

SERMONS,

ON THE

FOLLOWING SUBJECTS:

On the Clerical Character.
On Superstition.
On Miracles.
On Submission to the Existing Powers.
On the Love of Pleasure.
On Temperance.

On the Temporal Disadvantages of Vice.
On Happiness.
On Evangelical Righteousness.
On Justice.

BY THE

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RECTOR OF CLAVERTON, SOMERSET, LATE FELLOW OF ALL
SOUL'S COLLEGE, OXFORD, AND CHAPLAIN TO THE
COUNTESS DOWAGER OF CHATHAM.

TO WHICH IS ADDED,

A LETTER FROM A FATHER TO HIS SON
AT THE UNIVERSITY.

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AND SOLD BY

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M DCC XCIX.

TO
SIR WALTER JAMES, BART.

OF LANGLEY, BERKS,
THESE FEW DISCOURSES

ARE INSCRIBED;

NOT FOR HIS PATRONAGE,

FOR, I FEAR, THEY MAY NOT DESERVE IT;

NOT FOR HIS INSTRUCTION,

FOR, I TRUST, HE DOES NOT WANT IT;

BUT AS A SLIGHT MEMORIAL

OF A FRIENDSHIP

WITH WHICH THE AUTHOR HAS BEEN HONOURED

BY A RESPECTABLE FAMILY,

ABOVE HALF A CENTURY;

AND AS A SLENDER TRIBUTE OF GRATITUDE

TO SIR WALTER IN PARTICULAR,

BY

HIS OBLIGED AND AFFECTIONATE

HUMBLE SERVANT,

R. GRAVES.

SIR WALTER LAMONT, HARRIS

OF LANCING, HARRIS

THESE NEW DISCOVERIES

ARE (CONTINUED)

NOT FOR THE HARRIS

WE HAVE BEEN VERY MUCH INTERESTED

IN YOUR REPORTS

AND WE ARE VERY GLAD TO HEAR

OF YOUR SUCCESS

IN YOUR WORK

AND WE ARE VERY GLAD TO HEAR

OF YOUR SUCCESS

IN YOUR WORK

AND WE ARE VERY GLAD TO HEAR

OF YOUR SUCCESS

AND WE ARE VERY GLAD TO HEAR

OF YOUR SUCCESS

R. GRAVES

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PREFACE.

THE author of these discourses, from the peculiarity of his situation, and as a relaxation after the fatigues of an irksome employment, in which he was many years engaged, having within these twenty years been the *editor* of nearly that number of volumes, of a lighter and merely amusing kind, (though by no means, he trusts, unfriendly either to religion or virtue) thought it not amiss, even in regard to decency, to give this proof at least, such as it is, that he has not been totally inattentive to the duties of his profession.

He is aware, that there are many and much better discourses on most of these subjects:

but

but as the same truths, set in a different light, make different impressions on the same mind, he is not entirely without hopes that, among other forlorn publications of this kind, they may be of some little service to the cause in which they were written; otherwise he would not have obtruded them on the publick.

It is not to be supposed, indeed, that the idle or the dissipated, to whom alone these compendious essays might perhaps afford some useful hints, will sit down in form to read sermons; but it is a well-known truth, that many persons have been roused to a sense of their errors, and to reform their lives, by looking into a book accidentally thrown in their way, or "lying in a parlour window," as Montaigne expresses it; who have been deaf to the remonstrances of their friends, and their authorized instructors.*

* St. Augustine is a remarkable instance of this, who, after resisting for many years the admonitions of his excellent mother Monica, and the influence of the Holy Spirit, was almost instantaneously converted, by dipping into this passage
in

It will probably be said, that more able defenders of our religion are wanting in these times;^b which, alas! is a melancholy truth. Yet, in seasons of danger, we admit of recruits below the military standard. And, certainly, if we reflect on the virulence with which our holy faith has of late been attacked, and even the duties of morality called in question, the friends of religion and virtue ought to "rise in a mass," (to use the modern phrase) and oppose the legions of infidelity.

It is as a practical monitor, however, rather than as a polemick disputant, that I have ventured to enter the lists, and to *risk*, not *defy*, the criticisms of our literary cen-

in St. Paul's Epistles, (which he had been reading in a garden) Rom. xiii. 13. "Not in rioting and drunkenness, "not in chambering and wantonness," &c.

See his devout and entertaining Confessions, book viii. ch. 8.

"Quid fecerit in horto."

^b ——— "Non defensoribus istis

"Tempus eget."

VIRG.

sors;

sors; whom I consider, in general, where party is not concerned, as a respectable and useful body of men; who often prevent their fellow-subjects from mis-spending their time and their money on worthless productions; and to give those who are better employed than in reading every new publication, some little knowledge of what is going on in the literary world.

ERRATA.

- Page 2. l. 9, for "may give," read *may have given*.
 3. l. 14, read *the* world.
 5. l. 10, read in a temporal as well as spiritual view.
 40. l. 5, read *may be* such.
 penult. for "histories" r. *historians*.
 58. Note, read "See Bishop of Sarum's Criterion, Dr. Adams, &c."
-



of the world, the distinguishing character, as well as the chief cause of the profligacy of the present age, is

SERMON I.

ON THE CLERICAL CHARACTER.

Preached at the ARCHDEACON'S VISITATION, at BATH and at FROME.

Opinions it may give occasion to many ex-

cellent defences of Christianity, and to the establishing of

1 THESSALONIANS V. 6. THEREFORE LET US NOT SLEEP, AS DO OTHERS; BUT LET US WATCH AND BE SOBER.

WHETHER the wickedness of the present age exceeds that of all former generations, is a dispute frivolous in itself, and impossible to be determined. A question of this kind, however, proceeds upon a supposition extremely unfavourable to the times we live in; I mean, that they must be distinguished by no ordinary degree of iniquity, to give occasion to so ignominious a comparison.

But, as different kinds of wickedness have been observed to prevail in different periods

of the world, the distinguishing character, as well as the chief cause of the profligacy of the present age, seems to be a total indifference in respect to religion, an inattention to things serious, and a prevailing disregard to the precepts of the Gospel. The liberty, or rather the licentiousness of the press, though, by calling in question the most venerable opinions it may give occasion to many excellent defences of Christianity, and to the establishing its truth on a more solid and impregnable foundation; yet has it produced the obvious effect of unsettling the notions of weak people, and of introducing almost an universal scepticism, and a consequent corruption of morals, amongst every degree and order of men. The legislative part of our constitution indeed seem thoroughly sensible of our disease, and have been from time to time preparing wholesome antidotes against the profaneness and immorality of the people. But, as if they despaired of the efficacy of their prescriptions, the laws are suffered to lie dormant; and a man would be avoided as an informer, or ridiculed for his singularity, who should attempt to put them in execution.

And,

And, in reality, the utmost effect of human laws is only to punish some few *ouvert* acts of profligacy, which possibly may check the violence of the torrent, but can have little influence on the fountains which supply it. The minds and principles of the people seem to be the chief sources of corruption, and those religion alone can thoroughly rectify and reform.

Now, if there be an order of men who are particularly intrusted with the religious and moral instruction of their brethren, who are appointed to inspect and *watch* over their spiritual conduct, from *them* principally this world will expect the most vigorous efforts towards a reformation. At least, *they* will not fail to be charged by their enemies with a culpable neglect; and be considered, however unreasonably, as accountable for the evils which other concurrent circumstances may have contributed to produce, and which their utmost endeavours could not have prevented.

This, however, to omit other arguments, shews the peculiar obligation we of the clergy are under,

First, to *vigilance* in our profession; and secondly, to *sobriety*, or a decent severity in our manners and our example; which are the two particulars that I shall take occasion to insist upon from the words before us; “Therefore, let us not sleep, as do others; “but let us watch and be sober.”

This exhortation is addressed by St. Paul to the converts at Thessalonica, the capital of Macedonia, whom he had been forewarning of the dreadful judgment which threatened the dissolute Jews, by the approach of *the great day of the Lord*; which expression was applied by the primitive Christians, both to our Lord’s coming in judgment at the end of the world, and to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. The exhortation to *vigilance* in his converts, alludes chiefly to that fatal security in which the unbelieving Jews were involved, in regard to their approaching destruction. And the words *be sober*, though in their literal sense they prohibit all kinds of intemperance, yet, in this place, they seem to be *figurative*, and exhort them to be *serious* and *attentive* to the duties of their profession.

But

But not to insist on the original application of the words, I shall consider them as exhorting *us*,

First, to *vigilance* in discharging the duties of our profession; and

Secondly, to *sobriety*, or a decent severity in our manners and example.

First then, as to vigilance in our profession. This, we must be sensible, is not only our duty, but our interest, and that in a temporal view, as well as in a spiritual view.

That it is our *duty*, need hardly be mentioned; because it is essential to our office, to watch over our flocks with a pastoral care; and if we are apprehensive of any extraordinary danger from any prevailing vice or corruption of manners, to guard against that with more than ordinary vigilance and circumspection.

The allusion to *watchmen*, which our translation suggests, is not quite accurate, as the original means rather the being awake and alert; but the idea is very apposite, significant, and expressive. The bulk of mankind, as busy as they are, and *awake* to their secular affairs, are yet (by too easy a metaphor) said to be *asleep* with regard to their spiritual concerns.

concerns. Sunk in the down of sensuality, and devoted to the enjoyments of this life, they *forget* God their creator; and consider things so remote, as the joys of heaven or the terrors of hell, as mere dreams and idle speculations. They have, therefore, great need of, and we are accordingly appointed as *watchmen* over their souls; to give the alarm, and to warn them of the approach of their spiritual adversary, "who may come in the night, "and sow his tares whilst they sleep." Who, whilst they are engaged in business or pleasure, and their consciences are at rest, may take advantage of their security, and ensnare them with temptations; against which, if awakened by proper hints and admonitions, they might have been upon their guard and preserved from falling.

Hence, then, appears the *importance*, as well as the *reality* of our charge. As we are accountable in some measure for the good behaviour of our brethren, we have no way of acquitting ourselves of the guilt of their misconduct, but by a faithful and serious discharge of our duty, "both in season and out "of season;" by rousing them from their
lethargy,

lethargy, and *warning* them of their danger,
 “whether they will hear or whether they
 “will forbear.”

For we may observe, by the way, that there is a reciprocal obligation on every rank of men to listen to our admonitions, and to attend, at least, the stated seasons of spiritual improvement; which, in Christian countries, are annexed to the publick worship of God. Yet, this obligation seems not sufficiently attended to by many persons of good sense and a liberal education; who, because they are conscious (perhaps really so) “of more understanding than their teachers,” think therefore they are at liberty to absent themselves from the places appointed for the instruction of the vulgar. But they should consider the duty of “assembling themselves together,” as enjoined by the authority given to the church, and enforced by the laws of the state; not merely as a school for the ignorant, but as a wholesome discipline for the worldly and the carnal, as a kind of forcible avocation from their secular concerns, and as necessary intervals of sacred recollection. And though they may not
 want

want to be taught their duty, yet, such is the frailty of our nature, that the best and wisest of us require frequently to be put in mind of it.* Besides, there is reason to believe (at least they cannot be certain of the contrary) that, however mean the instruments may be, yet God will give a peculiar blessing to every sincere and humble attendance on these publick institutions; which are certainly, in some sense, of divine appointment. Not to mention the duty they owe to God, and to the community; not to influence by so pernicious an example their less enlightened brethren, who may stand in need of every means of instruction, of every opportunity of admonition or reproof; and to whom these plain lessons may be of the utmost importance, which are needless to men of more refined ideas and superior understanding.

Issues of the state; not merely as a school for
 * Those in the highest stations, or who exult in the light of superior knowledge, should yet consider themselves in the same circumstances of temptation with the Roman generals in their triumphs, who disdained not the attendance of a slave in their procession, to put them continually in mind, "that they were mortal."

With

With regard to the bulk of mankind, then, the duty of *vigilance* in their respective pastors seems to require something more than a mere cursory discharge of their office in *publick*. So various and complicated are the diseases of the mind, so manifold and subtle the devices of Satan, so constantly new and unexpected are the temptations to sin, that it must be impossible for any set discourses—any general harangues against vice and immorality, to answer the particular exigencies of every individual; but there must be frequent need of private applications. Not that we are obliged, as the practice of some is, to single out any particular part of our parishes into separate assemblies, and compliment them with private expositions of scripture, or puzzle them with the nice distinctions of schoolmen or divines; which kind of knowledge has not only an evident tendency to inflate their pride, and to inspire them with uncharitable sentiments of their excludèd brethren, but must also fill them with a comparative contempt for, and defeat the end of the publick ordinances of the church. We ought, however, to watch over the spiritual conduct

conduct of every single person (as far as it is practicable) with a "godly jealousy;" to search out, with discretion, their connections and attachments, and discover what peculiar circumstances seem to hinder their conversion. We must observe their particular tendencies to vice, and caution them against "those sins that do most easily beset them." We should listen with condescension to their scruples; and, where there is need, exhort, or rebuke with all authority; and, in short, apply our general reproofs of vice to their particular failings and irregularities. For such is the pride of human nature, that every one will evade the application of the most obvious representation to his own case, and think his neighbour alone concerned to listen to the preacher. But we must endeavour, in private, to bring home our reflections to men's bosoms, and "shew the people their transgressions." We must awaken, if possible, every guilty person, and assure him that it is he in particular, and not his neighbour, who stands in need of a reformation.

These things are too obvious to be insisted upon; and we cannot be ignorant of our duty
in

in this respect. Neither do I think we are in general very deficient in the practice of it. And yet, this is the pretence, not only of the profest enemies of our establishment, but of some well-meaning persons, who pretend the greatest regard for it. They would insinuate, "that the watchmen are asleep, "as well as the people;—that they are altogether become abominable; that there is "none that doeth good, no, not one." God forbid, however, that we should be offended at their zeal or their diligence, where they are regularly exerted; or condemn their doctrines, most of which, when properly explained, are undoubtedly those of the Reformation. But, on the other hand, let not these zealots thus wantonly scatter their indiscriminate censures on every minister of the church; who with less parade, and without those extraordinary pretensions, endeavours, to the best of his power, to discharge the duties of his function,

We cannot be too vigilant, however, nor too frequently inculcate every precept of the Gospel in the present age; when vice and prophaneness have been visibly gaining ground

ground and enlarging their territories; when the infection of luxury, and the poison of Deism, seem to be descending hand in hand amongst the lowest of the people; so that one hardly meets with a wicked peasant, or a dissolute mechanick, who cannot defend his practices by the sophisms of infidelity. For thus much may certainly be said, to the disadvantage of this enlightened age, that, if the populace in general are more knowing in the theory of religion, they are likewise more completely so in the practice of wickedness. If they are less ignorant, they are also less innocent, than in the days of our forefathers. The clouds of superstition may indeed be removed by the bright discoveries of the moderns, but then the restraints of religion are likewise greatly diminished.

The truth is, they have taken it for granted, that the whole of religion consists in thinking precisely as they do, on a few particular articles of our faith. And therefore, if their curiosity leads them into any religious assembly, where the subject of the discourse happens not to be, at that time, on justification by faith, regeneration, or any of their favourite

favourite topicks, they immediately condemn the preacher as a mere moral man, and entirely unacquainted with the essential doctrines of Christianity. But surely they cannot be ignorant, that the reason why our pious reformers laid so great a stress upon those doctrines, (that of justification by faith alone in particular) was in opposition to one of the most pernicious errors of the church of Rome, which substituted certain superficial rites or superstitious performances (such as masses, penances, and death-bed charities) in the place of true holiness and purity of heart, and the meritorious sufferings and atonement of Jesus Christ. So that there is not the same necessity in this age for insisting so frequently upon those doctrines, as there was at the time of the reformation.

Reason, indeed, if she were rightly improved and her dictates faithfully pursued, would infallibly lead men to virtue and happiness. But the encouragement so industriously given to the most illiterate Christian, to think for himself, in contempt of the authority of his teachers, can produce nothing but arrogance and confusion. The glimmering
light

light which their understanding, thus tampered with, affords them, will only make them despise the instruction of others; whilst they are bewildered and led astray by the incoherent suggestions of their own imaginations. And, what is worse, we too frequently find the passions and appetites of such pretenders to spiritual knowledge usurp the place of their reason; and their moral and religious characters are usually of a piece, equally irregular, wild, and inconsistent.

It cannot be denied, indeed, but that in higher life we hear of many noble instances of generosity and charity, compassion and benevolence, amongst those who disclaim any regard to revealed religion, and who seem ashamed to do good upon Christian principles. But certainly, men that act upon so precarious a motive as mere inclination, passion, or fancy, can give no security for their virtue; but when a different passion or inclination takes place, may be guilty of cruelty, injustice, or the most flagrant excesses of sensuality; which supposition, I am afraid, is but too frequently verified in the practice of the world.

Here,

Here, then, seems to be the most proper field for our vigilance and circumspection. Before we can hope to reform men's practices, we must endeavour to rectify their principles. Morality can have no solid foundation, but upon religion; "Jesus Christ," that is, the Christian religion, being "the chief corner-stone." We must endeavour, therefore, by all means, to convince them of the fundamentals at least of our faith, however captious they may be about the mysterious or controverted parts of it. If they acknowledge the being, the providence, and the perfections of God, let them be shewn likewise the corruption of man, and the necessity of a Redeemer to restore him to the favour of his Maker. Let them reflect upon the dark and perplexed state of religion and morality in the heathen world, and how probable it was, that God should "send forth his light and his truth" to guide his bewildered creatures in their way to virtue and happiness. And if, in consequence of this, we can but convince them of the divine mission (the incarnation and resurrection) of Jesus Christ, it will be easy to prove the duty of acquiescing under
any

any difficulties, which men of little (and but little) penetration may easily raise against so complicated a scheme as that of our redemption; or against the books that contain the history of it.

Our vigilance, then, in these and other instances of our duty, will not only be rewarded in the final event of things, but will likewise prove greatly our interest in a temporal view.

In the idea of temporal interest, I would by no means include any sordid or mercenary considerations. The most valuable interest of liberal and ingenuous minds is of a different nature; I mean, the securing the dignity of their profession, and the respect and veneration due to their persons and characters, which are not only the proper rewards of virtue and industry, and really valuable to every honest mind; but are also necessary to the successful discharge of the duties of our function.

Now, though we may justly, perhaps, boast ourselves as the delegates of Christ; and, I am convinced, derive our mission from an authority superior to any earthly power;
yet,

yet we cannot but observe a prevailing disposition, in the present age, to treat with great freedom both our characters and our pretensions. Though we may truly stile ourselves, in a peculiar sense, the servants of God, yet even the graver sort are apt to consider us merely as the servants of the publick, and seem to expect an account of our labours, and of the application of our talents. Now so long as we appear serious and vigilant in the discharge of our duty; whilst we use our utmost endeavours to make men sincerely religious, sober, and temperate, frugal, loyal, and industrious; the severest politician must acknowledge our services to the community; and own the "labourer to be worthy of his hire." And as to men of a more ludicrous turn, it is hardly possible that vigilance and fidelity in our lawful callings should ever be the object of ridicule, but must meet with veneration from men of any understanding; and put to silence the wantonness and impertinence even of folly itself.

Indeed, every man will be esteemed according to his merit in his proper profession. It would be little to our advantage to

excel in other instances—in the knowledge of the world or the polite accomplishments of it, or even in the abstruser sciences or elegant arts, any further than they are conducive to the end which we ought to have in view. But whatever influence we can gain by industry and application in our proper spheres of action, this we shall enjoy unrivalled; this painful kind of pre-eminence no one will envy us, as we are extending our influence where no one else has the like pretensions. In short, if it is our interest to live with credit and respect in the world, to secure the esteem of all good men, and the veneration even of the bad; it is our interest to be vigilant in the duties of our profession.

I proceed, then, to consider, briefly, the peculiar obligation we of the clergy are under,

2dly, To *sobriety*, or a decent severity in our example; which is the other particular suggested by the words of the text, “Therefore let us not sleep, as do others;” “but let us watch and be *saber*.”

Here, however, I may venture to assert, that (strictly speaking) nothing is unlawful in the ministers of the Gospel, which is lawful

ful in any of its professors. As men, certainly they are entitled to all the natural rights of humanity. They must be considered as having the same appetites and passions, the same wants and infirmities, with the rest of their fellow-creatures. They ought not, therefore, to be condemned as worldly and sensual, or reproached as giving the lie to their profession by their lives and conversation, merely because they partake of the common enjoyments of life, or are as careful to make a provision for themselves and those that depend upon them, as other members of the community. *Moderation* in those secular concerns, and not an absolute *renouncing* of them, is the subject of their doctrine; and while they keep within those bounds, which they prescribe to others, they cannot reasonably be accused of hypocrisy or prevarication.*

However, though all things are lawful unto us, "all things may not be expedient."

* Unless by those persons who (as an ingenious writer observes) "consider food and raiment as types and shadows, "unworthy the perfection of the Gospel, and to cease with "the ceremonial law."—*Dr. Eckard's Contempt of the Clergy.*

Prudence and decency may recommend what no law has enjoined. We should allow something to the opinions of others, though they may be erroneous, and condescend to the scruples, nay, even to the weaknesses, of our brethren. A good commander will not only set a good example to his soldiers in what he commands them to perform, but will submit to hardships which might discourage those below him, when he leads them on to any glorious undertaking. And can we think any thing too difficult to be undergone, for promoting the great end which our profession has in view—the temporal and eternal happiness of our fellow-creatures? Much less should we repine at those trifling restraints, to which, either to avoid giving offence or to recommend our doctrine to others, we may be obliged to submit. For we must consider, that, however dissolute the generality of the world may be in practice, they are yet rigid enough in speculation; I mean, when their neighbour's conduct is the subject of their scrutiny. And even those that can allow themselves in the greatest irregularities, will not fail to

censure

censure the smallest offences in other men. From those especially, that are appointed as preachers of righteousness, they will expect a greater degree of perfection than from ordinary Christians. In every art or science, not only a greater skill, but a more faultless execution, is required from the masters in those sciences. And in the practice of religious duties particularly, “the disciple will be so far from thinking himself obliged to be above his master, that he will think it more than enough to be as his master.” A superiority in practising the duties of the Gospel will not only be granted, but expected from us. And though we do our best, we must expect others to fall as far short of our example as we do of the perfect rules of the Gospel. We should endeavour, therefore, that our pattern be as perfect as possible, that those who copy after us may not have any defects in this, as well as in their own want of ability to discourage them. In short, though we may be thought by the world too rigid perhaps in our precepts, we shall never be thought so in our practice. Nay, our slightest failings and infirmities will be aggravated or
misrepre-
sented

misrepresented; much less can we hope for any indulgence to our voluntary neglects or irregularities. Even those freedoms which we may be sometimes tempted to indulge ourselves in from laudable motives, from a proper deference to our superiors, to gratify our equals, or to gain the good-will of our inferiors, will infallibly be made use of as objections to the sanctity of our characters; or, at least, will be produced as a plausible sanction for the greater irregularities in their own conduct. Our blessed Saviour himself could not escape the opprobrious titles of "a glutton and a wine-bibber;" merely from his sometimes frequenting (with the most gracious design) the occasional entertainments of his friends and countrymen.

How cautious then ought we to be in our conduct, even with regard to the indifferent things of common life; we had better be too indulgent to others than to ourselves. It may be prudent sometimes to connive at the weaknesses of our brethren, but can never be so to overlook any frailties or imperfections in our own characters; especially if we are concerned to retrieve the honour of our holy religion

religion, in an age that seems inclined to explain away the rigour of its laws, and to reconcile every kind of indulgence to the precepts of Christianity. We should prove, by the strictness of our lives, that nothing is required of us in the Gospel but what is practicable; and by the cheerfulness of them, that nothing is enjoined us but what will contribute to our present, as well as to our future happiness.

To conclude, if there be really any foundation for the frequent complaints of the decay of true piety, of the supineness and indifference of too great a part of mankind with regard to the duties of Christianity; this is certainly the strongest motive for exerting our utmost endeavours to remedy these disorders, by an extraordinary *vigilance* in our stations, and an exemplary *sanctity* in our conduct.

The advocates for religion, and the friends of virtue, have too frequently had cause to lament, that their efforts for a reformation have been obstructed by the more forcible example of licentious courts, formed under the influence of irreligious or profligate princes.

princes. But, as we have the happiness of living under a more auspicious reign, when profaneness and immorality are discountenanced by the highest authority, and virtue and piety recommended by the most amiable examples,* it will be a particular reproach to *us* if *we* are wanting on our parts to promote so glorious an undertaking.

But, above every consideration of this kind, let us remember, that the salvation of our own souls and of those committed to our care, is a very serious and important concern. And though we serve an indulgent master, who will have compassion on our infirmities and pardon our failings, yet, he will also require a strict account of the wilful neglect or misapplication of the talents, more or less, intrusted to our charge. And, “to whom-
“soever much is given, of him shall much
“be required.”

* As this tribute to exalted merit was dictated by truth, every one must with pleasure acknowledge, that it has continued to be equally applicable to our amiable sovereigns, through a reign of near forty years duration.

ON
SUPERSTITION.

SERMON II.

Ἐνιοὶ φεύγοντες τὴν δασιδαιμονίαν ἐμπέψυσιν εἰς
ἀθεότητα τραχείαν καὶ ἀντίτυπον.

PLUTARCH.

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SERMON II.
ON SUPERSTITION.

ACTS XVII. 22, 23.

THEN PAUL STOOD IN THE MIDST OF MARS-HILL, AND SAID, YE MEN OF ATHENS, I PERCEIVE THAT IN ALL THINGS YE ARE TOO SUPERSTITIOUS,

FOR AS I PASSED BY, AND BEHELD YOUR DEVOTIONS, I FOUND AN ALTAR WITH THIS INSCRIPTION, "TO THE UNKNOWN GOD."

WHILE St. Paul, in the course of his travels, was preaching the Gospel at Athens, certain philosophers brought him before the great court of the Areopagus;* more from curiosity, no doubt, than as a criminal, though they represented him as a "setter-forth of strange gods," because he preached Jesus and the resurrection.

* It should evidently have been translated, "in the midst of the court of Areopagus." Where, among other crimes, the introduction of new religions was punished.

Potter's Greek Antiquities, vol. i. p. 101.

The apostle, instead of endeavouring to conciliate their favour by dissembling his opinions, having seen the city wholly given to idolatry, boldly, yet with an affectionate concern, charges his accusers and the Athenians in general, with "being too superstitious." "For (says he) as I passed by and beheld your devotions, I found an altar "with this inscription, *To the unknown God.*"

Now this is precisely the original idea of superstition, the fear of some *unknown*, invisible power; whom, being ignorant of his true nature, we endeavour to propitiate by absurd, unmeaning, and, perhaps, wicked rites and ceremonies.

It may seem strange that the Athenians, the most enlightened people of the heathen world, a nation of philosophers! should be thus addicted to superstition, and ignorant of the true object of religious worship.

A plain man, of good sense, on contemplating the beauty and harmony of the creation, with evident marks of wisdom and design in every thing around him, would find no difficulty, one should suppose, in acknowledging some great, intelligent, First

Cause

Cause of all things; the Creator and Governor of the world; the Author of his being; and, therefore, the only proper object of his devotion.

But the vanity and presumption of these philosophers, though they saw and despised the popular superstition, yet unwilling to confess their ignorance of what it is impossible for our limited capacities fully to comprehend, not being able to form any idea of the nature and essence of God, (as, indeed, they cannot of their own souls, or of any spiritual substance) they ran into a contrary extreme, and absurdly concluded (many of them at least) that this stupendous fabrick of the universe was an effect without a cause; that where every thing appeared to be formed with marks of design, it was made by chance; and though it was continually subject to *change*, that it was self-existent from all *eternity*. Those, therefore, that excluded an intelligent principle from the universe, consistently enough with so wild a supposition, rejected all religious worship as superfluous; and hence have been led to consider religion and superstition as synonymous terms, to express the same thing. This

This seems to be the case with many of those in this age, who are properly called "*men of the world*," who, being immersed in sensuality or occupied in the pursuits of avarice or ambition, and never finding time for serious reflection, are too apt, without giving themselves time to examine the subject, to confound religion with superstition; and often to represent them both as the offspring of ignorance and folly, and fit only to keep in awe the unthinking multitude.

One would imagine indeed, from the reiterated complaints and idle clamours of some writers, and the frantick proceedings of a neighbouring nation, that nothing was wanting to restore the golden age and to complete the felicity of mankind, but to banish superstition, that is, all religion, as well as despotism, out of the world. Whereas the reverse of this seems rather to be the truth of the case, especially in this kingdom, and the crimes and outrages which disturb society, to proceed rather from a prevailing disregard to religion, and from a want of due submission to the legal restraints of a truly free government.

Although

Although the Apostle then had sufficient reason to censure the Athenians as too superstitious, who "worshipped they knew not what," our modern apostles of infidelity cannot surely, with any appearance of reason, retort the charge on his genuine followers, "who know whom they worship, even that God who made heaven and earth and all things therein," as St. Paul describes him in this address to the Athenians.

I shall take occasion, therefore, from this passage,

1st, Briefly to point out the obvious distinction between true religion and superstition; and,

2dly, Supposing religion to be debased, (as it too often has been by ignorance and error) yet, that superstition itself, so inimical to the happiness of individuals,* is yet less detrimental to society than no religion at all, than atheism and infidelity; contrary to the

* Plutarch, in his treatise on this subject, speaks of superstition as more inimical to the happiness of *individuals* than atheism; "haunting them in their dreams, and damping all their enjoyments," &c. But he cautions men against the other extreme of atheism, which he calls *ῥαχέω*, a rude or horrid state of mind.

opinion of some respectable writers; as well as to the practice of those philosophical patriots who, to emancipate men from the terrors of superstition, would free them from the restraints of every kind of religion, both natural and revealed.

This might seem an unnecessary task; were it not notorious, that societies have been formed in this country, where not only the *relative duties** of parents and children, husbands and wives, sovereigns and their subjects, but the being of a God has been called in question, and made the subject of debate, and books, destructive of religion and morality, so freely distributed amongst our labourers and mechanicks in every part of the Kingdom.

First, then, superstition, as was observed, is an irrational dread of some unknown, invisible power, whom our imagination represents as capricious and arbitrary; and always

* It has been made problematical, whether a son ought to obey his father, if they happen to differ in opinion? And, whether a woman that has married a husband, whose temper she dislikes, may not make a fresh choice?—and repeat it (I suppose) till she meets with one that suits her fancy.

ready to vent his wrath on his votaries, for the least defect in their moral conduct, and more especially for the omission of the least ceremonious performance, which they imagine to be his due.

This is the original and primary idea of superstition; although the word has been extended, and is more frequently applied to those pompous solemnities, and mere external rites themselves, by which we fondly hope to render the Deity propitious; or when we rely on the merit of any positive institutions, without any regard to the moral purposes which they were intended to promote.

For, it must be observed, that in all religions, even in the Christian, (the most simple, and at the same time the most rational, that ever prevailed in the world) there are some significant, external rites, or positive institutions, which no candid or serious person would ever deem to be superstitious.*

Religion, on the contrary, in its general sense as a duty, is the obligation of a rational

* That species of vulgar, anile superstition, which torments itself with omens and prognostications, is not our concern in this place.

creature, to render to the Deity such acts of homage and obedience as are due to the transcendent excellence of his nature; as the Creator and Governor of the world, and the Being on whom he absolutely depends for his happiness and his existence.

But religion as a sentiment, and as opposed to superstition, consists in an habitual reverence of the Divine Being, and a devotion of the heart and affections to his service, founded on a *rational* conviction of his power, wisdom, and goodness; which will naturally shew itself in a conformity of our lives and actions to his moral perfections, his justice, mercy, purity, and truth.

The superstitious man, when he approaches the object of his devotion, trembles with the awe of a slave before a tyrannical master; the religious man feels the filial reverence of a son for an indulgent father; the one does his duty from a principle of *fear*, the other from that of *love*.

The superstitious man, like the hypocritical Jews, so emphatically described by the prophet, "afflicts his soul, and bows down
"his head like a bull-rush," and exhibits
every

every external mark of contrition and remorse, and flatters himself that he has done all that is required of him. The religious man, on the contrary, "deals out his bread "to the hungry, and brings the poor man "that is cast out, to his house; clothes the "naked; and hides not himself from his "own flesh."

Again, the superstitious man is gloomy and morose, viewing those who differ from him in their creed, with hatred and suspicion; as profane apostates, and the objects of God's wrath. The religious man, from the innocence of his life, and the consequent tranquillity of his own mind, is always cheerful and serene; and the habitual sense of the Divine Omnipresence restrains every uncharitable, malevolent, or envious thought; and his love of God displays itself in the love of his neighbour, and extends to all his fellow-creatures.

In short, though the absurdities of superstition may be the object of ridicule, the devotion of a truly religious man must exalt

^b Isaiah lviii. '7.

his character in the eyes of every good and candid observer, as it inspires a sublimity of soul, and enables him to look down with equal indifference on the splendors and on the accidents and calamities of human life; he relies on the protection of Providence, and bids defiance to the malice and injustice of the world; "he fears God, but fears not what man can do unto him." And though not exempted from them, yet he rises, in some measure, superior to the evils of mortality.

But the refinements of modern philosophy, as they represent the personal devotion of individuals as superstition, have of course endeavoured (especially in a neighbouring nation) to abolish all religious worship whatsoever; unless the pedantick and childish imitation of paganism, in deifying the abstract ideas of liberty and reason, may be called such; and would absolutely extinguish every spark of religion and piety in the minds of men, (if such an attempt were not vain and impracticable) and literally "live without God in the world."

Now,

Now, the same arguments which are brought to prove the obligation of individuals to worship their Creator and Preserver, must be extended to prove also the obligation of societies, as such, to unite in praise and thanksgiving for blessings received in common: for fruitful seasons and national prosperity; and likewise, in supplications for deliverance from publick calamities; from war, pestilence, or famine; from hostile invasions, and powerful and ferocious enemies.

If we appeal to our feelings on these occasions, what is more natural, than to implore the protection of Heaven when destitute of any human assistance? And the universal practice of the untutored multitude, of flying to their altars in distress, though it may be called superstition and prejudice, seems an unequivocal argument that these sentiments are consonant to nature and truth.

In short, who but those wild theorists that act in contradiction to the maxims of wisdom and policy adopted by every civilized state, since the creation of the world, would think of ruling a mighty nation without some kind of religion; or would wish to eradicate

eradicate that universal sentiment of mankind, when even those infidels who deny the *truth*, acknowledge the *utility* of religion. And, though they would persuade us that the belief of a Deity and a future state was the invention of priests and politicians, they *own* it is an excellent state-engine to keep the multitude in awe. Every good man, therefore, if the evidences of our religion were less cogent than they are, would wish that they were more so; and if he had any doubt of its *truth*, would act conformably to its *precepts*.

But I proceed, as I proposed, 2dly, To enquire, whether superstition itself be not less prejudicial to society than atheism; contrary to the opinion of some respectable writers,^d as well as to the proceedings of some modern philosophical legislators.

It is difficult to account for the conduct of those ingenious men, who profess to believe in a God themselves, and to give any satisfactory reason, why they should be so

^d Mr. Bayle, Lord Shaftesbury, &c.

fond of maintaining a paradox so offensive to persons of real piety and tender consciences. They seem to act like perverse children, who, in spite of any caution or remonstrances, will venture to the very brink of a precipice, to shew their courage, and alarm the fears of those that attend them.

Whether this question, then, be to be decided by reason or by experience, superstition, I am persuaded, will be found to be less detrimental to society than atheism or no religion at all.

The advocates for the contrary opinion will tell us, that superstition debases the mind, obstructs its exertions, and renders men less fit for the duties of social life; that it perverts the moral sense, and often brings men to approve and perpetrate actions naturally odious, as laudable and meritorious.

While an atheist, on the other hand, may have just notions of right and wrong, and, from a mere sense of the beauty of virtue and the deformity of vice, may be induced to practise the one and avoid the other; and consequently may be a good member of society, and an honest man,

Now,

Now, though neither of these positions will be disputed, and though superstition may lead to practices highly unnatural and immoral, as it certainly has done,* yet they may such as do not greatly affect society at large, and as such. Whereas an atheist, though he may have a moral sense of the beauty of virtue, is under no obligation to practise it; as it is now generally understood, that nothing but “the will of God can, “strictly speaking, constitute moral obligation;” at least, the moral sense and the fitness of things will have but little effect on the conduct of the licentious multitude, or of any one under strong temptation.

In short, though a man *may* act virtuously and honestly without any reference to the Divine Being and the sanctions of religion, when he has no temptation to the contrary,

* As to those horrid rites imputed to superstition, particularly human sacrifices; they seem, in many instances, to partake more of revenge on conquered enemies, than of religious acts; not to mention, that many of the savage customs, ascribed to the Scythians, are supposed to have been aggravated by the Greek histories.

† See Warburton's Div. Leg. b. 1.

yet surely, it is more probable that one who, in addition to the moral sense and even the laws of the land, is under the influence even of an *irrational dread* of some supernatural power and a future state, should act virtuously and honestly, than one who is under no restraint of that kind.

This part of the argument, then, amounts to no more than this, that an atheist *possibly* may be a good member of society; the superstitious man probably *will* be so; but a truly religious man, at least (if I may add) a true Christian, certainly must be so—a good citizen, a good subject, a good father, and in short, a good man in every relation of life.

If this enquiry be brought to the test of experience, it will, I trust, be at once decided to the disadvantage of infidelity. Because, though superstition may be, as it certainly has been, detrimental, atheism must be absolutely destructive to society. For many nations have continued through ages under the darkness of superstition. But we shall not find, in the authentick records of mankind, that any nation of atheists has, nor is it probable

bable that such a society ever will subsist for any length of duration.

But we shall be told of the horrid persecutions, cruel massacres, and destructive wars in every age of the world, excited by superstition.

That this is true, to a great degree, must be granted, for I would not be an advocate for superstition, any further than as opposed to atheism and infidelity.* Yet, many of those wars, persecutions, and massacres, especially in the dark ages of Popish usurpation, might probably be ascribed rather to the avarice and ambition of the ruling powers, or the opposite interests of contending factions, than to superstition; as might, perhaps, be shewn, by a proper investigation of particular instances.

And when the Roman Pontiffs published their crusades or holy wars, for exterminating

* Though some indulgence may be allowed to the superstition of the dark ages, when ignorance and error had overspread the Christian world, yet we should guard against the erroneous doctrines of those conscientious Emigrants, who may think it their duty to impart their spiritual instructions to those whose humanity has afforded them an asylum in their distress.

heretics,

heretics, they seem to have been more solicitous to preserve their power and secure their revenues, than to propagate or defend their religion; the truth of which, indeed, some of them are said not to have believed.

And though the common people were led blindfold in the chains of ignorance and error, yet their mistaken piety kept them, in general, virtuous and peaceable; and, I doubt not, more happy in their ignorance, than those misguided wretches in this enlightened age, who, from the imperfection unavoidably incident to the administration of human affairs, see just enough to make them dissatisfied with their governors, their teachers, and every thing around them; and excited by interested demagogues, ready, on the slightest pretences, to involve themselves and their fellow-subjects in a state of anarchy and confusion. Which, as universal experience shews, must necessarily end in the despotism, whether of *one* or of a *few* artful men; as the only refuge against the miseries of democrattick fury and endless discord.

But let us contemplate in theory, (for it is to be hoped we never shall have an opportunity

tunity of forming our judgment from experience;) let us contemplate not a few philosophers, amusing themselves in the search of truth and idle speculations in the retreats of learning,^a but an extensive community of atheists, of ignorant or half-enlightened millions, freed from the restraints of religion, and all apprehension of a future reckoning, given up to the free indulgence of their sensual appetites and impetuous passions, at liberty to corrupt themselves and injure their neighbour, as their interest or caprice might suggest. What can be conceived more dreadful than such a state of things? Human laws would frequently be evaded, or prove but a weak and inadequate defence against crafty and unprincipled offenders; who, like beasts of prey escaped from their confinement, would probably assault and destroy their keepers.

This I have supposed to be an imaginary state of things; but we have seen it partly realized, during the short triumph of infidelity amongst our neighbours on the con-

^a In hortis Epicuri. Cic.

inent.¹ For, it is hardly credible, that such unheard-of massacres, and such enormous acts of cruelty and injustice, could have been deliberately perpetrated, but by a people destitute of every principle of religion and the fear of God, as well as of the feelings of humanity. But one would charitably hope, that the deluded multitude were excited to such acts of ferocity by a comparatively small number of philosophers and politicians, determined, at any rate, to establish their own power, or to gain some favourite point; which their perverted imagination represented as of more importance than the lives or happiness of thousands of their fellow-creatures.

With such a representation, let us again compare a community governed even by an imperfect political system, but aided

¹ It is hardly conceivable, that a whole nation, distinguished by its politeness and refined manners, should have undergone so sudden a change, by assuming a republican form of government; which, however, they have so much disgraced by their cruelty and their rapacity, that posterity will be apt to consider republican as another name for robber and assassin.

N.B. This was written in the year 1793. The government has now assumed a less ferocious aspect.

by

by the influence of a religion, though deformed by superstition. Let us compare most of the nations of Europe, even in Catholic countries,* for centuries past; or even our own country in the last century, though in a state of intestine commotion, yet never shall we hear of a series of such massacres and slaughter, while the people were restrained by a sense of religion; though disfigured by fanaticism and superstition.

But if religion, though deformed by error and debased by superstition, have yet this beneficial influence on society, what friend to virtue and the happiness of his fellow-creatures would think of excluding from his political system the *Christian* religion? A religion, which not only teaches us to "worship God in spirit and in truth," but in every page so strongly inculcates every moral and every social duty; justice, charity, temperance, sobriety, and chastity; and not

* "Religion, in Catholick countries, has still a very powerful influence. See the poor labourer or mechanick, at stated times of the day, prostrate before his tutelar saint; who, he is verily persuaded, will intercede for him with his offended Maker. His idea is erroneous, but it has its effect."—*Extract from a late Tour by Mr. Pratt.*

only enforces the relative duties of private life, of parents and children, husbands and wives, masters and servants, but commands us to be peaceable citizens and loyal subjects, "to obey magistrates and those who have the rule over us, *not* only for *wrath* but for conscience sake," that is, not merely for fear of civil punishment, but from a conscientious motive, as a religious duty; enforced by the powerful sanctions of future rewards and punishments.

The practice of these precepts, which it is so much the interest of every individual to practice, would, I doubt not, contribute more to the prosperity and happiness of the community, than all the vain theories of our modern legislators; who, it is to be feared, will soon be convinced of the impolicy, as well as the wickedness, of having deprived their citizens of the influence which even their corrupted system of Christianity had on the morals and political conduct of the people.¹

¹ Even Frederick the Great, is said to have declared before his death, that he would give up his most splendid victories to restore religion to the same state in which he found it, on his accession to the throne.

To conclude; though any caution against superstition may seem unnecessary in this "*age of reason*," there is one species of it to which too many are liable in every age: that of laying a greater stress on a right faith, than on a virtuous conduct.

But we are certainly in much greater danger of the contrary extreme, that of profaneness and infidelity.

The dispute at present is not, as it was in the days of the prophets, between Jehovah and Baal, between idolatry and the worship of the true God; it is not a controversy between Papists and Protestants, churchmen and dissenters, or between the advocates for natural and the defenders of revealed religion; the contest now is between theism and atheism, between those who *acknowledge* and devoutly worship, and those who *deny*, the existence of a Deity, the Creator and Governor of the world. Consequently, not only the foundation of all religion, but of morality and virtue, is at stake; and, in the end, the very existence of society and the happiness of mankind. Infidelity and immorality are often reciprocally cause and effect. The infidel,

fidel, generally speaking, will be found immoral; and the immoral man, in hopes of silencing his conscience, will probably soon become an infidel.

But let not the sophisms of superficial reasoners, nor the impious raillery of illiterate libertines, induce us to give up, under the idea of superstition, a religion sanctioned by the testimonies of martyrs and confessors, and embraced as their pride and their consolation by the best and most respectable characters from its first propagation to this day.*

It is, then, not only the duty, but the interest, of every individual of the community to unite with its authorised teachers in the support of religion. Those especially of elevated rank, and who live in ease and affluence, if they value their possessions and the distinctions which they enjoy, should not be

* Who would believe, that in an enlightened nation any one could be found, who would listen to the illiterate scurrilities of Thomas Paine, against that sublime system of true religion and pure morality, which was embraced, defended, and elucidated, by Newton, Locke, Boyle, Addison, Bryant, and an innumerable host of the most learned philosophers? Not to mention such divines as Hooker, Barrow, Clark, Bishop Watson, &c. &c.

contented with their private devotions, (which, one would charitably hope, many people of rank still perform) but should use their utmost influence to cultivate sentiments of piety in their families and their dependants, by regularly attending the publick worship themselves, and setting an example to their less enlightened inferiors; who, probably, have no other means of religious instruction than from the pulpit. Nothing but religion can mitigate the impetuosity of the selfish passions, or subdue the turbulent spirit of the discontented multitude. Those who are unrestrained by any principle of that kind, will listen with eagerness to every plausible advocate for *liberty*, and be ready to execute any desperate project which may be suggested to them, and which promises, in the slightest degree, to improve their present condition.

But let such be taught the social *duties*, as well as the natural *rights* of man. Let them learn the obligations of a Christian, as well as of a citizen; the peculiar doctrines and divine precepts of the Christian religion; the sanctions of which (as has been already observed)

observed) will contribute more to the peace of the community and the happiness of individuals, than any improvement in the science of legislation that human wisdom can devise. Which divine institution, though impious men have endeavoured to subvert it, yet is founded on a rock; and neither the devices of man nor the machinations of hell shall finally prevail against it. "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but the word of God shall not pass away till all be fulfilled;" till the beneficent scheme of Providence for the salvation of mankind be perfectly completed.

May the Sovereign Ruler of the universe, who has set bounds to the raging ocean, and said, "hitherto shalt thou go and no further,"¹ give a check to the unjust and destructive ravages, and the more destructive opinions of a nation, who have not only decreed the subversion of all the governments of the earth, but with gigantic impiety made war against the Majesty of Heaven!

¹ Job xxxviii. 11.

May God, in his mercy, inspire them with more moderate counsels, restore them to a right mind, and at length bring them to acknowledge the truth of that religion which is so wisely calculated to promote the happiness of mankind in this world, and their eternal salvation in the world to come!

Amen.



ADVERTISEMENT

ON

MIRACLES.

SERMON III.

ADVERTISEMENT.

THIS discourse was not written with the vain hope of convincing those who assert "that no testimony can prove the truth of a miracle," but merely to suggest the expediency, that Providence should occasionally interpose, in an extraordinary manner, in the government of mankind; and the probability that he has done so.

But though miracles were necessary credentials for the first preachers of the gospel, and though no historical facts were ever better attested than the miracles recorded in the New Testament, yet the truth of our religion does not rest entirely on that, or on any external testimony, so much as on its internal evidence: which, to those who duly consider the purity and perfection of its morals, the sublimity of its doctrines, so wonderfully adapted to the present state of human nature, so different from what had ever before been revealed to mankind; to such the internal evidence must be irresistible;^a and they will be forced to confess, that our blessed Saviour "spoke as never man spake," and that "flesh and blood could not have revealed them to him."

In short, when men have wearied themselves at the "broken cisterns" of vain philosophy, they will, I trust, return to these "fountains of living waters," which alone can satisfy that thirst after happiness which is inseparable from human nature.

^a Soame Jenyns, *Jortin's Discourses*, &c.

SERMON III,
ON MIRACLES.

2 ST. PETER III. 3, 4.

KNOWING THIS, THAT THERE SHALL COME IN THE LAST
DAYS, SCOFFERS, WALKING AFTER THEIR OWN LUSTS,

AND SAYING, WHERE IS THE PROMISE OF HIS COMING?
FOR SINCE THE FATHERS FELL ASLEEP, ALL THINGS
CONTINUE AS THEY WERE FROM THE BEGINNING OF
THE CREATION.

BY "the last days," the earlier Jews
generally understood the age of the
Messias, which their traditions represented
as the last period fixed for the duration of
this world.

But by "the last days" the apostle here
seems to mean that period of time which
was to put an end to the Jewish economy,
and the destruction of Jerusalem by the Ro-
mans; with the approach of which great
event

event the apostles often encourage their converts to patience and perseverance, as the unbelieving Jews, their great enemies, would then be destroyed, and the kingdom of the Messiah be diffused throughout the whole world.

The scoffers, which St. Peter here alludes to, were probably some Jewish converts, who, though they had a great reverence for the books of Moses, and the prophetic writings of the Old Testament, and gave credit to the wonderful works recorded in them, yet seem to have been inclined to disregard the predictions of our Saviour and his apostles; particularly that of Christ's coming in judgment for the destruction of Jerusalem, and the consequent redemption of his church by the establishment of the Christian religion.

“Where is the promise of his coming? (said they) for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.”

The account which the apostle here gives of these scoffers, is remarkably characteristic, not only of the profane ridiculers of religion, but, I am afraid, of many virtuous and sensible

sible persons in this age; who, though they cannot but admire the morality of the gospel, (and, perhaps, will acknowledge it to be an authoritative republication of the law of nature) yet they reject every thing that is miraculous or supernatural in the affair. They seem to think that Providence rules the world by a regular system of second causes; and that "all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation."

They find it difficult, indeed, to elude the force of the historical evidence of the miracles wrought in proof of our Saviour's divine mission; and to account for the amazingly rapid progress which Christianity made in the world, in opposition to the interests and the corrupt passions and prejudices of mankind. But they will take refuge in any hypothesis, though ever so absurd, rather than allow the credibility of the miraculous interposition of Providence. Nay, a late ingenious writer^a and good historian has boldly asserted, that no testimony, however

^a See Bishop of Landaff's Answer to Gibbon, &c.

^a Mr. Hume.

respectable,

respectable, is sufficient to prove the truth of miracles; because, it seems, they are contrary to our *experience*.* The absurdity of which argument, and indeed of every other argument opposed to the reality of the gospel miracles, has been sufficiently exposed by the most learned and most able writers of our own and of foreign nations.

I shall not, therefore, enter into this important controversy, or a general defence of the Christian religion; but, as the facts on which the truth of revelation is founded are not capable of a strict demonstration, I shall recall to your memories such important periods in the history of mankind, in which it seems at least extremely *probable*, and even, morally speaking, *necessary*, considering the wisdom and goodness of God, that he should have "sent forth his light and his truth," and by some visible and extraordinary display

* I have often wondered, that Dr. Paley, who has written so well on the evidences of Christianity, should use so unguarded an expression, as "dismissing from our system whatever contradicted the experience of mankind."

Dedication to the Bishop of Carlisle.

* See Dr. Adams, of Shrewsbury, &c. &c.

of his power, should have awakened mankind from their moral lethargy; and have given them fresh instructions in their duty, which their bewildered reason was not able to discover, and to bring them back to the practice of true religion and virtue.

That which prevails with many well-disposed people, to doubt of the truth of revelation, is, I believe, (as before observed) the same with that of the infidels in the text, that "all things seem to continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." They see things go on at present in a regular uninterrupted course, according to the established laws of nature, without the visible interposition of the Divine Being; and they cannot bring themselves to believe that, in any age of the world, things proceeded in any other manner, or that the course of nature was ever interrupted or suspended by any supernatural power.

But, as in some measure analogous, let them apply a similar mode of reasoning to the course of their own lives.

Since they arrived at manhood, they probably go on from day to day, and from year

to

to year, in some uniform course of business, pleasure, or amusement, so totally different from that which employed them in their infancy, and their ideas of things are so entirely changed from what they then were, that they can hardly persuade themselves of the identity of their own persons. And, if they reflect upon their mode of existence for many months before they came into this world, there is nothing more unaccountable or seemingly miraculous, and contrary to what they now *experience*, than this natural yet wonderful phenomenon.

Neither are the transformations or changes, which various animals and insects undergo in their different modes of existence, from lifeless lumps to mere reptiles, from reptiles to volatile or winged animals, less wonderful or mysterious than the miracles to which they object.

In like manner, if we trace the history of mankind through the different ages of the world up to their first creation, we shall be obliged to confess, that they must have existed under a different œconomy or administration of Providence, at different periods
of

of the world, from that under which they at present exist.

First, then, I shall take it for granted, that notwithstanding the many wild projects and whimsical hypotheses of philosophical infidelity, there will never be discovered a more probable or more rational account of the origin of mankind than what we meet with in the books of Moses.

Now when our first parents came forth from the hands of their Creator, (which act itself, though contrary to all *experience*, the greatest infidel, I presume, will acknowledge to be miraculous) how were this first pair to subsist or act in their new state, without a divine revelation, or the miraculous interposition of their heavenly father? Can we suppose that He, who gave them life, would leave them destitute in a new world, without the means of supporting themselves in this *unexperienced* situation? They would have been, in a literal sense, as the Roman poet describes them,¹ a mute and brutish herd, incapable of speaking or expressing their

¹ Mutum et turpe pecus. Hor.

wants,

wants, and of providing for them; and, so far from being fit to "have dominion over" the brute creation, that, from their less perfect instinct, they would have been in a much worse condition than the brutes themselves.

Here then some supernatural assistance seems to have been so absolutely necessary for the subsistence of the first pair, that none but the wildest sceptic can doubt, that God did (as Moses informs us) frequently by his ministring Angels interpose, and, in some manner, converse with his creatures for their necessary instruction and subsistence. And, indeed, we are further informed, that they were no sooner left to themselves than, by the abuse of their noble privilege of free-will and an improper indulgence of appetite, they violated the only positive precept given them by their Creator, fell from their original perfection, and became extremely miserable. And their appetites and passions becoming now too strong for their perverted reason, they became daily more corrupt; and in process of time, "every imagination of "man's heart was only evil continually."

And

And by the length of the lives of these antediluvians, they were encouraged and had opportunity to execute their most wicked purposes; so that the whole race of mankind, except a very small number, were arrived at such an enormous pitch of wickedness, that the hand of the Creator was again wanted to correct and reform his own works. And accordingly the history informs us, and every circumstance concurs to confirm the account, that God destroyed the whole impious race, except eight persons, by an universal deluge; which awful event could not possibly be brought about but by the miraculous operation of the God of nature.

Again; from the religious principle natural to man, ill-directed by ignorance or by craft, in a few centuries after the flood, we find the whole habitable world overrun with superstition and idolatry; insomuch, that the knowledge and worship of the one true God was in danger of being utterly lost and extinguished on the earth.

Here, again, was a state of affairs worthy the interposition of Divine Providence, as the morality, and consequently the happiness,
of

of mankind, are so materially affected by the truth or falsehood of their religious opinions, and the purity of their devotion.

Then it was that God thought fit, by the call of Abraham from the idolatrous nations amongst which he dwelt, to separate a peculiar people from the rest of mankind, to keep alive the knowledge of himself and of his laws. And the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in a visible manner, by fire from heaven, was certainly a just and necessary miracle to put a stop to the exorbitant progress of the most unnatural and brutal vices.

A long series of prodigies, signs, and wonders, attended the divine mission of Moses, whom God raised up to deliver his people, the only depositaries of the true religion, from the tyrannical bondage under which they groaned, and in which they were *unjustly* detained; in a country which has always been esteemed the parent and nurse of the grossest idolatry.

Miracles again became necessary, and were accordingly on various occasions wrought, in the times of the idolatrous kings of Israel, when the true worship again began to be corrupted

rupted, and idolatry was in danger of being established in its room; God judging it fit to preserve the knowledge of the truth and the expectation of the Messiah among that people, from whom he was to descend, and amongst whom he was to be born.

When the "fullness of time," foretold by the Prophets and expected by the Jews themselves for the appearance of our Redeemer, was now approaching, though the world was then enlightened by the study of philosophy and the cultivation of science, yet true religion and sound morality were almost banished from human society.

As for the Jews, they had almost lost the true meaning of their law, by their absurd traditions and licentious interpretations; and flattered themselves, that the strict observance of the ceremonial would atone for the most notorious violations of the moral law.

The Gentile world were licentious in their principles, and corrupt in their practices. Impurities, and immoralities of every kind, were practised amongst them, without shame or reproof: exposing of children, inhumanity to their captives, and cruelty to their slaves,

their obliging men in their publick shows to fight with wild beasts, or gladiators to murder each other for their *diversion*; all these horrid practices, as well as their lewd and idolatrous worship, called aloud for a reformation.

This then was another important period in the religious and moral state of the world; and to correct these enormities, and to introduce a more perfect system of religion and morality, to establish a covenant of grace with mankind, and to acquaint them with the terms of acceptance with God, and of the pardon of their sins: for these important ends the Son of God himself became incarnate, or, was “made manifest in the flesh, “and dwelt amongst us;” and both he and his apostles were endued with power from on high to work miracles, as the credentials of their mission.

The miracles which they wrought were performed in the most publick manner, in the presence of their enemies, in an enlightened age, in various and innumerable instances, as appeals to heaven for the important truths which they delivered, and which they laboured to inculcate.

In

In short, the miracles which Christ wrought in proof of his divine mission, are so well attested, by witnesses, who gave up all the advantages of life, and submitted to persecution and ignominious and painful deaths, for the truth of their testimony, that we cannot, without the greatest absurdity, disbelieve them. For, as a most respectable writer on this subject observes, “that men should sacrifice every interest in this life, and all their expectations in a better, to attest a falsehood, is as contrary to the laws by which the moral world is governed, as the giving sight to the blind or raising the dead is contrary to the laws of nature.”

Although, therefore, God does not interrupt the course of nature wantonly; or too frequently work miracles, (which would defeat the end proposed by them) yet that he *has* done it, and might reasonably be expected to have done it, in the several ages of the world, on great and momentous occasions, when the truth of religion, the support of morality, and consequently, the happiness of

mankind, were at stake, does, I trust, appear from what has been suggested.

To conclude: let *us* then preach* and practise the sublime doctrines of the gospel, and the great duties of morality; let us inculcate piety and charity, justice, sobriety, and chastity, (which virtues are the ends proposed by all religions) but let us not surrender the fundamental support; the miracles, the prophecies, nor even the mysteries of our holy faith, recorded in the Bible, to the wild conceits and forced interpretations of some modern philosophers; who are determined to believe nothing but what they can fully comprehend; or rather, what they themselves have seen and experienced.

The powers of nature are and must be very imperfectly known to us; yet there are many things discovered to be true in one

* Preached at a Visitation.

* The whole history of the Jews, so different from that of the rest of mankind, their submitting for so many ages to so burthensome and expensive a ritual, and even their existing as a distinct people, without being able to unite in a regular society; dispersed amongst all the nations of the earth, persecuted, and a "by-word," as was foretold by their prophets 4000 years since, is, if not miraculous, a most astonishing fact.

age,

age, and in one country, which in other times, and in other climates, were and are thought absolutely incredible and impossible."

Let us not then withhold our assent from the testimony of credible witnesses, who assure us, "that things have not continued "precisely as they now are, from the beginning of the creation;" but that God has frequently interposed in the government both of the moral and the natural world, particularly in the establishment of the great and important truths of the gospel.*

Let us reverence Jesus Christ equally as our priest, our prophet, and our king; divinely commissioned to redeem, as well as to instruct and to govern his church or society of true Christians; who not only "spake as "never man spake," but performed such things as no man ever did or could perform; for "God was with him," or, as his beloved

* Electricity, aero-navigation, the freezing of water in the higher latitudes, &c.

* I have just now seen an excellent pamphlet of Mr. John Simpson's, "on the Novelty, the Excellence, and the Evidence, of the Christian Religion."

disciple

disciple expresses it, " he was with God;" and, though in a manner above our comprehension, " he was God."

To him, therefore, with the Holy Ghost, be ascribed all due honour, now and for ever more. *Amen.*



ADVERTISEMENT

ON
SUBMISSION

TO THE
EXISTING POWERS,

SERMON IV,

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE reader will not expect much novelty on so trite a subject. I have only endeavoured to state clearly and concisely, what I think to be the duty of every Christian, and the interest of every subject or citizen, generally speaking, under every government, whether monarchical or republican.

I have nothing to say to the modern theories, or to the rights of a whole nation suffering under an absolutely intolerable system of corruption or oppression. In regard to which, it evidently appears, that neither Christ nor his apostles ever interfered any further than to require of their converts, individually, implicit obedience to the existing powers.

Mr. T. Paine reduces the various forms of government to these two, hereditary and representative. Those who form their opinion of each in their studies, will probably think the latter preferable to the former; as in theory it seems to be. But those who judge from experience, and the tumults and virulent party altercations constantly attendant on elections, will surely esteem even an hereditary monarchy preferable to such a representative government, as after seven years convulsive struggles and bloody contests, has terminated in one of the most despotick oligarchies that ever existed.

The French theorists seem to have acted like those restless spirits on board a ship, who excite the crew to mutiny, seize the vessel, murder the commander, plunder the store-room, and, intoxicated with liquor, quarrel among themselves for superiority, and by placing unskilful pilots at the helm, run the ship aground, and perish amongst rocks and quicksands.

SERMON IV.

On Submission to the Existing Powers.

ROMANS XIII. 1, 2.

THE POWERS THAT BE ARE ORDAINED OF GOD;

WHOSOEVER THEREFORE RESISTETH THE POWER, RESISTETH THE ORDINANCE OF GOD.

SOCIETY is so necessary to the happiness of mankind and government, of some kind or other, so essential to the existence of society, that St. Paul, with good reason, pronounces "the powers that be," that is, government of every kind, to be "the ordinance of God." Every event of human life indeed, every institution and every action of man, (as being ultimately under the direction of a general Providence) may, in some sense, be called "the ordinance of God." But the government of states and kingdom, on which the publick happiness so essentially depends,

depends, may be supposed to be the peculiar object of God's care and protection. "It is God, (as the Psalmist expresses it) who stilleth the raging of the sea and the madness of the people." Intimating, that if the same Almighty Power, which sets bounds to the raging ocean, did not also controul and set bounds to the storms of popular fury and the headstrong passions of the multitude, they would be continually liable, from their partial and superficial view of things, to interrupt the administration of government and subvert their own felicity.

Whoever, therefore, either himself resists, or encourages others to resist, the supreme power, "resisteth the ordinance of God; and (as the apostle adds) shall receive to himself damnation;" that is, not only such punishment as the magistrate may legally inflict, but such as God has reserved for those that disobey *him*,

I am aware, that a very wrong use has formerly been made of these and the like expressions in the writings of the apostles, in times when the true principles of government were not so generally understood; and
by

by persons who mistook the hands in which the sovereign power was lodged, supposing it to be placed in the executive, independently of the legislative part of the community; and that it could not upon any occasion, even by proper authority, be transferred.

Yet, when rightly explained and under due restriction, nothing is more evident than the doctrine implied in the text, “that who-
“soever resisteth the sovereign power (where-
“ever that power by the constitution of any
“state is lodged) resisteth the ordinance of
“God.”

This obvious assertion, then, I shall endeavour to inculcate, and briefly to shew, that it is not only the *duty* of every Christian, but the *interest* of every citizen or subject under every form of government, to submit to the powers that are established in the country where he lives, and the unlawfulness and impolicy, in general, of a contrary proceeding.

The primitive Christians, adorned with that meekness, patience, and humility, with which their Divine Master had inspired them, thought it absolutely unlawful, on any pretence, to resist the most unreasonable and
cruel

cruel injunctions of the superior powers, unless when they interfered with their duty to God and the precepts of the gospel. But, in those instances where they could not obey, it is too well known they could suffer martyrdom, could submit to scourgings and imprisonments, and even rejoice in the flames, rather than do violence to their consciences, or disobey the commands of their Lord and Master. This was their remedy in all their difficulties, and, in this sense, passive obedience (if it be not a contradiction in terms) seems properly enough applied.

This doctrine, then, of "submitting to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake" continued to operate through every age of the Christian church, amidst the persecutions of Nero, Domitian, Dioclesian, and other heathen Emperors, for many generations, and no good Christian ever called it in question. But to the ambitious governors of the Romish church we are indebted for the unchristian doctrine of the lawfulness of resisting, deposing, and even murdering sovereign princes. Those pernicious maxims, which of late have been so freely avowed,
and

and in a neighbouring kingdom so cruelly put in execution.

As the supreme executive power, in these kingdoms, is vested by the constitution in a single person, (whether king or queen) and the supreme legislative power in the king, the nobility, and the representatives of the people; and as those powers, for the good of the whole, are delegated into particular hands, by the united suffrages or consent of the whole people, the sovereign power may certainly be said in some sense to be derived from the people. Yet, when a constitution of any kind is once formed, whether on true or erroneous political principles, and becomes peaceably settled and permanently established, it must thenceforth be held sacred; as having received the divine sanction from the permission of Providence; and those that wantonly and without extreme necessity disturb the peace of such a society, must be considered as “resisting the ordinance of God.” For there are manifest and certain advantages resulting from a peaceable and settled establishment, though not the best of all possible forms; and as certain mischiefs and calamities
are

are the never-failing concomitants of civil discord and tumults, of which it is not necessary to point out a deplorable example at this time. We may form in our imaginations plausible theories of government [and Utopian commonwealths] upon visionary ideas of perfection; and perhaps discover some trifling imperfections in our present form of government; though, with some improvements, it has stood the test of ages, and has been deservedly applauded by every unprejudiced foreign writer on political subjects.

But, instead of new modelling the constitution, it is the duty of a Christian to submit with meekness to "the powers that be," to the government already established in the country where and under whose protection he lives; and which, by having subsisted for any length of time, has been sanctioned by that mark at least of Divine approbation.*

* The terrible disorders which would arise from the dangerous principle, that either the magistrate or the people might renounce the contract, when either party had violated the terms of it, sufficiently prove how necessary it was for the publick tranquillity that Providence should invest the sovereign authority with a sacred and inviolable character.

A Citizen of Geneva.

By this rule the first converts to Christianity regulated their conduct under the various revolutions, usurpations, and disputed titles, in the Roman Empire ; I mean, by a dutiful submission to the authority of whatever rulers the superintending Providence of God, from time to time, thought fit to set over them.

If a prince in this country, indeed, should assume to himself a power of dispensing with or of acting contrary to the laws, which he has sworn to observe and impartially to execute, he would by that means divest himself of his real dignity. He would no longer appear as a sovereign magistrate, invested with the united power of a great and free people, but would degrade himself to the level of the meanest subject, over whom he exerts an illegal and tyrannical power; and who (as an acute writer^r observes) seems to have the same right to dispute his commands as such a prince has to enjoin them.

Yet, even in this case, a Christian subject, as an individual, cannot in conscience resist, but must submit with patience while such a prince continues on the throne, who, should

he unhappily persist in repeated acts of tyranny, "the political law would take place of the municipal law of the country," and the safety of the people would become the predominant principle; who, as experience has often shewn, would resume the power, which was delegated for their benefit, and not for their destruction; "a revolution would become necessary, and that necessity would produce one."

In judging of this *necessity*, however, it seems to be both the duty and interest of all subjects to proceed with the utmost caution and deliberation. For "the beginning of strife (as Solomon forcibly expresses it) is as the letting out of water;" and who can regulate the blind fury of an unprincipled populace, or say, "hitherto shalt thou go and no further." And the experience of all ages will convince us, that there never were civil commotions which were not attended, for the time at least, with infinitely more evils than they were intended to redress. Nay, it is a remarkable fact, in the

* Montesquieu.

* Lord Lyttleton's Persian Letters.

Roman history, that more blood was shed in four months, in the confusion which succeeded upon the death of Nero, than had been wantonly spilled in the fourteen years of that most cruel and sanguinary reign. A fact! worthy the attention of those zealous patriots, who are daily exciting the unhappy multitude to riots and insurrections, by indecent reflections on the most respectable characters; or by inflammatory representations of the errors and imperfections to which every human institution is liable, or of the unavoidable difficulties in which every administration must sometimes be involved.

As there is no nation upon earth which has "statutes and ordinances more just" and equitable, than those which we are blessed with, so there is no period in our history, when the laws were more duly executed; or justice more impartially administered, than in the present times; of which we cannot desire a stronger proof than that the most virulent enemies of government, who have been spying out and aggravating the least flaw in the administration of it, have been forced to magnify a single murder accidentally

ally committed in a tumultuous insurrection, into a bloody massacre; and to represent the constitutional exertion of the prerogative, in the pardon of one or two criminals, as assuming a dispensing power, and as an arbitrary violation of the laws of the land.

But supposing that, amidst the perplexed and arduous affairs of government, in any state, some abuses should have crept in, or even voluntary mismanagement too palpable to be overlooked, have taken place, (which, however, I am convinced, is not at present our case) yet, if affairs are in any degree tolerable, every wise and good man would certainly chuse rather to wait for redress from the Providence of God, or the ordinary course of human affairs, than endeavour to excite the people to apply desperate remedies, and rush headlong into rebellion.

It seems probable, however, that the greatest part of the civil commotions which we read of in history, have had their origin in the interested views or the disappointed

^b This alludes to the riots in St. George's-Fields, during Mr. Wilkes's popularity.

ambition of a few individuals, rather than in any palpable necessity of the case.

In our own country, in the last century, though doubtless there were some real grievances, and many great abuses in the government established by custom, which called for redress; yet the people in general were rich and happy, and would have patiently acquiesced under some certain evils, rather than have risked much greater by a rash resistance. But, when excited by some few turbulent spirits to rebel, and under a pretence of more perfect liberty, they were drawn into a civil war, and soon began to repent of their rashness; the whole constitution was dissolved, all ranks were confounded, property seized, and estates sequestered: and instead of enjoying greater liberty, they were at length reduced to the most abject state of slavery under the most tyrannical usurpation that ever existed in this kingdom.

Liberty, indeed, would be cheaply purchased at any price. But liberty is rather the pretence, than the real object of most political contests; and we ought never to forget, that true liberty can never subsist but

under a regular government, and a due submission to established laws; which, though they may be perverted or suspended in times of peace, they must be totally subverted amidst intestine commotions. And if the populace gain the superiority in the dispute, which too frequently happens, no tyranny is more intolerable than that which is exercised under a democracy, by an ignorant and capricious multitude. To which may be added, the remark of a profound political writer; that “a popular tyranny never fails to be followed by the arbitrary government either of a single person or of a few artful individuals, under the specious title of a Republick or Commonwealth;” of which remark, we have at this time a glaring instance in a neighbouring nation. For when the people, by destroying the venerable fabrick of an established government, are in full possession, as they imagine, of their freedom, they grow jealous of each other; and, wearied out with a variety of projects, they give up the reins to the first bold and ambitious leader; who, instead of the wholesome restraints of which they at first complained, will be obliged, for his

his own security, to keep a stricter hand over them, and "rule them with a rod of iron."

To conclude; as the most pernicious effects must ensue from frequent innovations and wanton resistance to the ruling powers, even the heathen sages thought it expedient that the sovereign authority should be invested with a sacred and inviolable character. And, though our Saviour and his apostles never interfered with the civil governments under which they lived, any further than to obey them, yet they constantly inculcated, under the strongest sanctions, an implicit submission to the existing powers, as "the ordinance of God."

Whatever trifling imperfections, therefore, we may fancy we can discover in our own constitution, or in the administration of our government, none but weak or wicked and interested persons would think of disturbing the publick tranquillity for the sake of reforming them; nor sacrifice our present state of ease and prosperity for a scene of anarchy and confusion. In our restless search after grievances in the state, we overlook the real blessings which we enjoy, the quiet and full possession

possession of our liberty and our property, the most impartial administration of justice, the protection which the meanest individual finds against the oppression of the rich and powerful; blessings which no nation under heaven enjoys in such ample security as we do.

In short, in our political speculations, let us not forget that we are Christians, the followers of him, who was "meek and lowly, and "patient of injuries;" which temper of mind he invariably and earnestly recommends to his disciples, as the true source of happiness upon earth, and as an indispensable qualification for the kingdom of heaven.



TEMPORAL
DISADVANTAGES OF VICE,

SERMON V.

TRINITY

DISADVANTAGES OF VICE

SERMON V.

SERMON V.

TEMPORAL DISADVANTAGES OF VICE.

PSALM XXXVII. 36, 37.

I MYSELF HAVE SEEN THE UNGODLY IN GREAT POWER;
AND FLOURISHING LIKE A GREEN BAY TREE;
I WENT BY, AND LO! HE WAS GONE; I SOUGHT HIM, BUT
HIS PLACE COULD NO WHERE BE FOUND.

THE Jews, as a nation, were under the government of a particular Providence, the sanctions of whose laws were temporal rewards and punishments. Their obedience, therefore, was generally rewarded with national happiness and prosperity, as their disobedience was punished by pestilence or famine, unsuccessful wars or captivity, or some other signal interposition of Divine Providence.

And, although the virtues or vices of individuals were not so regularly rewarded or punished by temporal blessings or calamities,
yet

yet there was generally so striking a difference between the lots of the virtuous and the vicious, that David has made it the subject of many of his Psalms, or divine hymns. But in no one is the contrast more regularly carried on from the beginning to the end, than in this, from whence the text is taken; "Fret not thyself (says he) because of the ungodly, neither be thou envious against the evil-doers; for they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and be withered even as the green herb." This he in some measure confirms by his own experience, in the words of the text: "I myself (says he) have seen the ungodly in great power and flourishing like a green bay-tree. I went by, and lo! he was gone;" &c.

As religion, or a reverence of God is the principal support of virtue and morality, by the *ungodly* the sacred writers always mean the wicked or immoral man; as in the idea of *godliness* they include the idea of every moral virtue.

Although no considerate person can dispute the preference of a virtuous to a vicious course of life, and though it has been the constant theme

theme of every moral writer, from the days of Solomon to this day, yet it is a truth that cannot be too frequently inculcated on men of every rank and condition of life.

No one, then, who has a rational conviction of the being and the infinite perfections of God, of his justice, wisdom, and goodness, can doubt of the certainty of a future state of retribution; where virtue will meet with its adequate reward, and vice will be punished with the utmost severity. But as in this life we see frequent instances of successful villainy, and of persecuted and distressed virtue, we may be tempted to call in question the boasted superiority, in a temporal view, of a virtuous over a vicious life.

Yet, notwithstanding these appearances, the slightest survey of the principal Christian and moral virtues, and their opposite vices, will convince us of their *tendency*, at least to produce the effects ascribed to them.

Thus piety, or a regular discharge of our duty to God, exclusively of any future consideration, and that tranquillity of mind which a clear conscience alone can procure, will gain us the esteem and confidence of
all

all good men, and promote our success even in this world; whereas, impiety, profaneness, and a reprobate conduct, will not only be attended with a sense of guilt and self-reproach, but render us contemptible, even in the sight of bad men, and destroy our credit, and probably be the cause of our total exclusion from all creditable society.

That justice and probity in our dealings with each other, are marks of true wisdom, and "the best policy," is so well understood, that it is become proverbial; as injustice and dishonesty seldom fail to terminate in loss of character, and to bring men to poverty and disgrace.

Temperance and sobriety evidently conduce to health and long life, with cheerfulness and serenity of mind; the chief ingredients of happiness; while intemperance or excess is the never-failing source of various maladies and diseases, and an immature death.

Frugality, though not a splendid, is a very necessary virtue, and deserves a more distinguished rank in the catalogue than is usually assigned it; as it contributes greatly to our own comfort and ease, and is the support of generosity

generosity and charity. Whereas extravagance is destructive not only to the fortune, but generally to the health of the individual; and though in common speech united with folly, it ought to be ranked with wickedness; as no one can be extravagant without injuring others, his family and dependents, and generally those unfortunate people who have supplied him with the things which he has so profusely squandered in riot and excess.

That this is the natural tendency of these several virtues and their opposite vices, no one will deny. That they do not always produce their different effects, must be ascribed to various accidental circumstances; which, unless Providence should think fit to overrule them by a continual miraculous interposition, *will* have their natural influence.

In the first place, then, neither virtue nor vice have an instantaneous effect on the condition of men in society, though by a secret and gradual operation they are generally attended with their respective consequences. If a man be born to riches and affluence, his wickedness will not immediately reduce him to beggary; nor, on the contrary, will virtue
miracu-

miraculously exalt a poor man to wealth or grandeur. The former, with his other vices, may be covetous or sordidly penurious; and the latter, by many concurrent accidents, may be prevented from rising beyond his original indigence and obscurity. What influence the vices of the one or the virtues of the other may have on their real enjoyment of life, is a different consideration.

Again; as religion and virtue will not secure men against natural evils, so wickedness does not necessarily expose them to their baneful effects. A good man may perish by lightening or in a storm, while a wicked man escapes; or be carried off by a contagious distemper, while his worthless neighbour survives the calamity; as in a siege or an engagement, the brave man and the coward fall promiscuously by the weapons of war.

But, in each of these instances, it must not be forgotten, that as it is happiness alone which makes life valuable, the virtuous man's condition, even in poverty or sickness, will be infinitely more eligible than that of the wicked amidst affluence and splendor; and that the former would meet death itself with fortitude

fortitude and serenity, while the latter, if not callous to all feeling, must expire in horror and despair.

But as the Psalmist rests his cause not on mere theory, but on his own experience, we may safely bring it to the same issue. And there is no one probably who has lived even a few years in the world, that has not had the like experience, and that cannot say, “*I myself* have seen the ungodly” in great prosperity, yet suddenly reduced by his vices to the most abject state of indigence and wretchedness.

As to nations or communities, as such, we may venture boldly to assert, that those where religion and virtue prevail, where the people in general are sober, honest, industrious, and frugal; peaceable and submissive to the laws; the natural result will be national happiness and prosperity; as on the contrary, where luxury, licentiousness, and sensuality, faction and sedition, are predominant; where the people have lost all sense of religion, and are become universally profligate and corrupt, the dissolution of such a nation, it is to be feared, is rapidly approaching; and nothing but

but a total reform,* not of the political constitution, but of the moral conduct of individuals, can save them from destruction.

We of this nation, by the blessing of Providence, have long been a powerful and flourishing people: let us not, by our daring impieties and shameless immoralities, provoke Almighty God to withdraw his protection from us, and to give us up a prey to our enemies.

For at this moment, we see also a neighbouring nation, whom it is no breach of charity to pronounce ungodly, (as they have not only abolished Christianity, but every form of divine worship, by a publick decree, and literally "live without God in the world") we see them, I say, at present "in great power and flourishing like a green bay-tree," or rather like a baneful yew, whose noxious dews will not suffer any thing to grow under its shade; but though Providence, for wise ends, may permit them for a season to tyrannize over nations, who, though less *impious* perhaps, may be equally im-

* See Mr. Bowdler's excellent Pamphlet on this subject.

moral, and for their sins may deserve to be chastised; yet, unless they repent of their error and “turn to the Lord,” and restore his worship in the land; if we may judge by the long-established maxims even of human policy, and by the usual course of Providence, God will assuredly “be avenged of such a nation as this.”

“Though righteousness,” then “exalteth a nation,” as Solomon observes, and “sin is a reproach to any people,” yet David, in this Psalm, addresses himself chiefly to wicked individuals in every class of society.

History will supply us with abundant examples of men “in great power,” of princes and potentates, who, for their tyranny and oppression, have fallen victims in the meridian of their glory, to the indignation of the oppressed multitude.*

But amongst the higher orders in the present age, how many instances do we daily see of those who are born to high rank and splendid fortunes, and possessed of all the

* This history of Imperial Rome will render any other examples superfluous.

means of being happy themselves, and of diffusing happiness to all around them; yet, instead of employing their wealth either in their own rational enjoyment, or in the heart-felt luxury of relieving the indigent or distressed, lavish it on licentious pleasures, and the unbounded indulgence of vicious appetites; and by a natural progress from one degree of profligacy to another, are soon reduced to poverty and distress; and, perhaps, either by disease or by some desperate act, before they have lived out half their days, “perish and come to a fearful end.”

If we descend to the middle ranks of life, (to men in trade or commerce suppose) that virtue and industry may sometimes be unsuccessful, while vicious characters prosper and flourish for a season, is a melancholy truth. In a crowd of competitors for the same object, some may be jostled out of the course, and even trampled on by those who make no scruple of gaining their end by any means, though ever so unfair and unjust.

But let us attend the several competitors for the prize of happiness in their progress through life: the sober, conscientious man,
who

who goes silently on in a regular course of industry and integrity, and is content with moderate gains, though viewed with contempt, perhaps, by his more enterprising and less scrupulous neighbour; yet will soon attract the notice of the good and respectable part of mankind, and by degrees find himself insensibly in a state of affluence, ease, and independence.

Another in the same line of business, unrestrained by any religious or moral principle, by some dextrous management perhaps, or even illicit transaction, leaves his plodding and less adventurous rival at a distance behind him, and starts up on a sudden a man of fortune. He now probably frequents the resorts of pleasure and dissipation, has his splendid villa, is ostentatious, if not hospitable; in short, "flourishes for a while like a "stately evergreen." But the more flourishing such hasty productions are, the more liable they are to be nipt by the frost of adversity. The result of such irregular proceedings will, probably, soon be like that of the Psalmist: "I went by, and lo! he was gone; I sought him," I enquired after him,

but

but his *place*, his superb mansion, his extensive pleasure-ground, and “the lands called “perhaps after his own name” were sold, and his residence was not to be found; or if found, it was probably in that last asylum of profligacy and extravagance, in the cells of a prison.

If the failure of some hazardous speculation, or the discovery of some fraudulent transaction, which it is the interest and the duty of every honest man to discover, or, perhaps, the chances of a gaming-table, should have reduced him on a sudden to indigence and shame, the ostentatious display of his wealth in prosperity, being deemed an insult on his less affluent neighbours, must expose him to that contempt in adversity which his pride has so justly deserved.

The same observations may be extended to every rank and description of men in society. To the unprincipled of every profession or calling in life, who by fraud or extortion, by monopolies or exorbitant gains, or by base compliances with men in power, raise themselves to sudden wealth or authority. As such persons usually grow giddy by their rapid

rapid elevation, they too frequently make a bad use of their riches, or abuse their power; and rarely escape as sudden a downfall.

We may ascribe all this to the natural course of things, and in some measure with truth; but we should consider, that this connexion between vice and misery, as well as that between happiness and virtue, is the appointment of Almighty God, and that every event which we behold is a part of his providential government of the universe.

In short then, it is impossible in the nature of things, as we term it, that any thing but religion and virtue should make men happy. A wicked and ungodly man may be rich and in great power, and flourish for a time like a green bay-tree, may dazzle mankind by his external splendor, and excite the envy of the world, but he cannot be happy. His friends or acquaintance may congratulate him on his good fortune, and consider his success in the world as a test of his intrinsick merit; but his conscience whispers a different language, continually alarms him perhaps with the fear of some fatal discovery, and his apprehensions anticipate its ignominious consequences.

“ Those

“Those that will be rich,” says the apostle, that is, who are determined to be so, by whatever means, “fall into temptation and “a snare,” are exposed to many “*foolish* and “hurtful lusts,” and soon overwhelmed in perdition and disgrace.

But though the principal design of this discourse was to shew the temporal disadvantages of an ungodly and wicked course of life, yet, if there is a power above us of infinite justice, holiness, and goodness, “he “must delight in virtue;” and as virtue therefore will not fail of its adequate reward, so vice will assuredly be punished with exemplary severity in a future state.

As the inference from what has been said is so obvious, I shall not expatiate on the subject any further than to caution those who are setting out on the journey of life, not to be drawn aside from the direct road of honesty and integrity, by the delusive splendor of an ample fortune, into the crooked paths of fraud and dishonesty, as a more compendious course to the end proposed. The degree of happiness intended for mortals, is generally within the reach of every one that

is possessed of a competence, health, a clear conscience, and a contented mind; riches and honours are comparatively the lot of but a few, and if they have acquired them by ungodly or indirect means, they are certainly not to be envied; so far from it, they must excite our pity or our detestation.

I cannot conclude this discourse better than with the Psalmist's conclusion from the same premises: Therefore, "keep innocence, " and take heed to the thing that is right, " for that shall bring a man peace at the last."

Amen.



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ON
TEMPERANCE.

SERMON VI.

TEMPERANCE

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ON TEMPERANCE.

1 CORINTHIANS, IX. 25.

AND EVERY MAN THAT STRIVETH FOR THE MASTERY IS TEMPERATE IN ALL THINGS. NOW THEY DO IT TO OBTAIN A CORRUPTIBLE CROWN; BUT WE AN INCORRUPTIBLE.

THE Corinthians (to whom this epistle of St. Paul is addressed) were not less distinguished for their refined luxury, than for the publick games,^a which (on some religious account) were celebrated near their city. They who contended for the prize at those games, were previously prepared by a severe discipline; and obliged, for several months, to observe an exact regimen, and “to be temperate in all things.” This, says the apostle, they cheerfully submitted to, luxurious as they were, in hopes of a mere hono-

^a The Isthmian games.

rary crown, of laūrel or palm, or other corruptible materials bestowed on them by their fellow-mortals. This instance St. Paul makes use of, as a more forcible argument for us Christians to be temperate in all things, that we may obtain a celestial and incorruptible crown, as the reward of our Christian course, from the great Judge of the universe.

“ Every man that striveth for the mastery, (or victory) says he, is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.”

From which words, I shall take occasion,
1st, To make some few observations on the virtue of temperance, and to enforce the practice of it; and,

2dly, To shew the peculiar obligation that Christians are under “ to be temperate in all things.”

First, then, temperance, in its utmost latitude, implies the due government of all our selfish passions and appetites, whether the object of them be riches, honours, or sensual pleasures. But as custom (which determines the use of words) has restrained the signification of temperance, chiefly to that moderation
which

which reason and religion prescribe in the gratification of our sensual appetites; particularly those which regard the necessary food, for the sustenance of our bodies, I shall consider it in that light.

Temperance, then, in this sense, implies such a moderate use of what are called "the good things of this life," as neither injures the health of our bodies, nor clouds the faculties of our minds, nor renders us unfit for the more important duties, or the more refined enjoyments of a rational creature.

The appetites of hunger and thirst were implanted in us by the Author of our being, to excite us to the use of those objects which are necessary for the health and preservation of our lives. But we are so constituted by our Creator, that the gratification of a natural appetite is necessarily attended with pleasure. To assert, therefore, (as some pious writers have done) that we ought to eat and drink with no other view, but merely to preserve our life, and that it is even sinful to propose to ourselves any *pleasure* in those natural functions, is in itself absurd, and contradicts the appointment of nature; because, whether

ther we propose it to ourselves or not, pleasure will necessarily attend the satisfying our appetites, even with the plainest food, if we wait the natural returns of hunger and thirst. Temperance does not require us to extirpate, or obstinately to resist, the original instincts of nature, but only to regulate them, and keep them within the bounds of reason and religion.

However, though these appetites are a constituent part, we must not imagine they are the whole, or even the principal part of our nature. We are designed for higher and more noble enjoyments, and have more important duties to attend than merely to pamper our bodies and to gratify our sensual propensities. We are formed for the knowledge and for the worship of God. To contemplate his works of creation, and to imitate his moral perfections. To practise virtue, and to promote the welfare of our fellow-creatures—according to our abilities. In short, to discharge the duties of our different stations, and to provide for the comfortable subsistence of ourselves and of those that depend upon us.

Now,

Now, whatever our situation in this world may be, whether we are set apart for any learned and contemplative profession, or engaged in the more active employments of life, intemperance must make us entirely unfit for either; and render us incapable of discharging the duties of religion or of virtue. We are required therefore to be as much on our guard as a centinel upon duty; to watch and to be sober; and beware lest at any time our hearts are so far overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, as to make us useless and unprofitable servants in the station assigned us.

Nay, this virtue of temperance not only forbids all excesses of this kind, but requires such an habitual *moderation*, as may preserve the freedom of our minds, and the health and activity of our bodies. That the one may be capable of enjoying those rational pleasures, which form the chief happiness of our natures, and the other be preserved in a condition for such honest industry and such useful employments, as our social or domestick relations, our duties to our families or to the community, may require from us. Those, therefore,

therefore, that either employ too much time in these mere animal gratifications, or though they may not be guilty of any flagrant excess, yet, so far indulge themselves as to injure their health, or to render themselves less fit for those several duties, offend, in some measure, against the laws of temperance and sobriety.

What shall we say, then, of those unhappy creatures (in the lower ranks of life) who abandon themselves to every degree of drunkenness and sensuality? Who, without the least regard to the demands of society, of justice, or of natural affection; to the distresses, perhaps, of their families and the cries of their helpless offspring; injure their fortune, dissipate their time, and sacrifice their health to the most selfish indulgences! Who seem to have no other restraint upon themselves than what necessity imposes, but will overload and even *torture* their appetites (as every sober man must judge) till nature recoils, and seems to reproach them with their brutality! Those, surely, who are arrived at such an habitual sottishness and stupidity, are unfit to have the conduct of their
own

own persons; and ought, with as much reason, to be [confined or] put under tutelage, as idiots or madmen.

But to set the beauty of temperance and sobriety in the most advantageous light, let us take a transient view of the two opposite characters of a temperate and an intemperate man; of one who is a slave to his appetites, and of another who keeps them under the subjection of reason and religion. As the former is a reproach, the latter is an ornament to human nature. The temperate man is always cheerful, yet always calm and composed; the virtues of his mind give a dignity to his person, which attracts the veneration of the good, and strikes with awe those who are conscious to themselves of the contrary failing. His understanding is clear, and his body active, and he is equally prepared for the necessary business, and open to the innocent enjoyments, of life. But if we cast our eyes to the opposite character—that of a sottish epicure, we behold the most wretched being in the universe; a rational creature under the tyranny of his sensual appetites; which he has so far indulged as to have lost

all relish for every other enjoyment. Not that he has any real enjoyment even of those sensual objects, but is tormented with an unnatural thirst, and waits with a restless impatience for the stated seasons, not of social mirth and festivity, (which might seem, in some measure, to palliate his wickedness) but of downright sottishness and brutal stupidity. Hence his understanding is clouded, and his imagination extinguished; and as he is rendered unfit for the serious business, so he has lost all taste for the common enjoyments and innocent amusements, of life. In short, his attention is entirely engrossed by his selfish appetites, and heaven itself would be no place of happiness for him, if deprived of his habitual gratifications.

If this be a just representation of the native charms and beneficial effects of temperance, and of the pernicious and fatal consequences of the contrary vice, we can need no other arguments, I should hope, to engage us to the practice of the one, and to inspire us with a just abhorrence of the other.

But the topicks hitherto insisted on may be considered chiefly as moral motives, and

to

to exhibit only the temporal advantages of this virtue; and those who are temperate on such motives may be said to contend for a *corruptible* crown; whereas we Christians expect to obtain an *incorruptible* one, that is, eternal happiness in heaven.

I shall, therefore,

2dly, As I proposed, consider briefly, the peculiar obligation that Christians are under to temperance and sobriety.

Christianity has too often been exposed to ridicule and contempt, by the inconsistent conduct of many of its sincerest votaries; who, from some few precepts of the gospel, which were only applicable to the distressed state of the first converts, have formed the most unnatural systems of severity and mortification. Whence it has come to pass, that they have made themselves obnoxious to the reproaches of their own consciences, and to the ridicule of the world, by complying with the most innocent demands of nature, in contradiction to their own visionary schemes of perfection.

But that Christianity has made no great alteration in the common enjoyments of life,

may appear from the conduct of our Saviour himself, who, if he had thought the pleasures of social life absolutely unlawful, would not have frequented the festive entertainments of his kindred and acquaintance; much less have worked a miracle, to relieve the distress of the bridegroom; but would have told him, probably, that all indulgence beyond the necessary demands of nature were contrary to the religion which he came to establish.

God forbid! however, that we should make any licentious inference from the conduct of our blessed Saviour, who frequented with the most gracious intention those places of public resort, and “went about doing good” both to the bodies and souls of those whom he conversed with; and both Christ and his followers were themselves more frequently exposed to hunger and thirst and all the distresses of poverty. And in every page of the gospel, we are commanded to take up our cross and follow him, to crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts, that is, to subdue our appetites to the strictest rules of temperance and sobriety.

Neither

Neither can we conceive it agreeable to the spirit of a religion, which is founded entirely upon future expectations, to allow its votaries any further indulgence in animal gratifications, than is absolutely necessary to their comfortable subsistence in this life; where we are considered as strangers and pilgrims, as men travelling through this vale of misery to our celestial habitations.

Again; every Christian is considered as the "temple of the Holy Ghost," who, by his secret influence, resides in the soul of every good man. Now, as the profanation of the Jewish temple (to which the apostle here alludes) was punished with temporal death, we have too much reason to fear, that those Christians, who pollute these temples of the Holy Ghost with gluttony and drunkenness, will be punished with eternal death from the justice of God. In short, St. Peter makes it the essential distinction between the first Christian converts and the Gentiles, that the former "lived no longer in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God." "For the time past (says he) may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when

“ when we walked in lasciviousness, *excess of*
 “ *wine*, revelling, banqueting, and abomina-
 “ ble idolatry.”

However, though the severer precepts of the gospel are not adopted as the distinguishing character of the present age, yet it must be owned, likewise, that the excesses of intemperance and drunkenness are not the prevailing vices in higher life, but seem banished amongst the lower and less enlightened part of mankind. The refined epicures of the present time have, in general, too good a taste in their pleasures to abandon themselves to those grosser indulgences, which destroy the health of their bodies, and render them less capable of enjoying the gratifications of a more delicate luxury.

One would hope, therefore, that the inferior part of the world, who are so fond of imitating the follies and fashions of their superiors, will by degrees discover the true policy (even in a temporal view) of living soberly and temperately; and then, by the blessing of God, they may be gradually led on to add to their temperance godliness, and every Christian and moral virtue.

In

In short, since to us Christians the “ end
“ of all things is at hand,” and the day of
retribution approaching, let us (as St. Peter
exhorts) “ be sober and temperate, and watch
“ unto prayer.” Let us be moderate in our
pursuit of the pleasures of this life, and
secure our title to the happiness of a better
state.

To conclude, with that solemn exhortation
of St. Paul to the Romans: “ The night is far
“ spent, the day is at hand; let us, therefore,
“ cast off the works of darkness, and let us
“ put on the armour of light. Let us walk
“ honestly as in the day, not in rioting and
“ drunkenness, not in chambering and wan-
“ tonness: But put you on the Lord Jesus
“ Christ, and make not provision for the flesh
“ to fulfil the lusts thereof.”

Now to God the Father, the Son, and the
Holy Ghost, be all due honour, now and for
ever more. *Amen.*

In short, since to our Christian the "day
of all things is at hand," and the day of
retribution approaching, let us (as St. Paul
expresses) "be about our duty, and without
intermission, let us make it our business to
bury in the glory of this life, and
account ourselves to the happiness of a future
state."
To conclude with that exhortation
of St. Paul to the Romans: "Things that
are spent, the day is at hand; let us therefore
cast off the works of darkness, and let us
put on the armour of light, let us walk
honestly as in the day, not in frothing, and
darkness, in the evening and night,
as do others: But put on of the Lord Jesus
Christ, and make not provision for the flesh
to fulfil the lust thereof."
Now to God the Father, the Son, and the
Holy Ghost, be all due honour, glory, and
ever more amen.

ON THE
LOVE OF PLEASURE.

SERMON VII.

OF THE

LOVE OF PLEASURE

SERMON VII.

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ON THE LOVE OF PLEASURE.

2 TIMOTHY III. 4.

LOVERS OF PLEASURES MORE THAN LOVERS OF GOD.

ST. Paul is here forewarning his disciple Timothy of some false brethren, who, he foresaw, in some future period, would disturb and disgrace the Christian church.

“ This know, (says he) that in the last
“ days perilous times shall come, for men
“ shall be lovers of their own selves, (that
“ is, selfish) boasters, blasphemers, truce-
“ breakers, traitors, and the like.” He then
concludes with the words of the text, “ lovers
“ of pleasures more than lovers of God.”

Whether those “ perilous times” to which the apostle alludes, are already past, or not yet come, it may not be easy to determine. But most of those ignominious characters, by which

which they are described, may, I fear, be found in the present age. Not to mention the many notorious transgressors in many of the particulars amongst ourselves, there is, we may safely say, a whole nation who are not only "*proud boasters*," but, confessedly, "*blasphemers and truce-breakers*;" who *blaspheme* and even deny the existence of God, and trample on the rights of man, who pay no regard to the faith of treaties or to the law of nations, but think every thing lawful which they have power to accomplish.

But not to reflect on the conduct of other nations, it concerns us all, as individuals, to consider, whether we ourselves do not fall under the censure of the apostle in the text, and are not "*lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God*."

Here, however, it must be premised, that the mere "*love of pleasures*" cannot in itself constitute a vicious character. All mankind must necessarily love pleasure; there is no difference in this respect between heathens and Christians, between saints and sinners; the devotee and the sensualist equally love pleasure, though their pleasures are of a very different complexion.

General and indiscriminate invectives, indeed, against the love of pleasure must be injurious to the cause of virtue; for who would embrace a virtuous course of life, if it were incompatible with every kind of pleasure? And by representing the Christian religion in too austere a light, and as an enemy to the common enjoyments of life, some of its sincerest votaries have often exposed themselves to the ridicule of the world, and to the reproach of their own consciences, by complying with the most innocent demands of nature, in opposition to their visionary ideas of perfection; whilst others, finding the strongest and most irresistible instincts of nature condemned by these pious Christians, have entirely rejected so unnatural an institution.

Nor can any one suppose, without the highest absurdity, that Providence has made a display of this beautiful scene of things, and endued every object around us with the power of giving us pleasure, merely as snares to our virtue, and as obstacles to our performing our duty. That we are constantly to shut our eyes against the beauties of
nature,

nature, and obstinately to resist every pleasurable sensation which those objects were fitted to excite, and which God has given us faculties to admire and to enjoy.*

But woe be to them! "who call evil good," who plead the cause of pleasure against that of virtue, and endeavour to relax the obligations of religion and morality.

For, alas! mankind in general want no arguments of this kind. Too great a part of the world are so far from denying themselves any *innocent* enjoyments, that they make the pursuit of guilty pleasures the chief business of their lives; and are not only "lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God," but are so entirely devoted to it, that they neglect every serious duty of life; "neither is God in all their thoughts."

It is of importance, then, to enquire, how far a good Christian may partake of those pleasures, which, under the appearance of innocent amusements, are too liable to inter-

* Yet St. Augustine, after his conversion, laments that he could not eat and drink when hungry or thirsty, without receiving pleasure from those natural functions.

Confessions l. x. of
fere

fere with our duty to God. And this, from what has been already observed, it is no difficult matter to determine. The comparison here implied, between the love of pleasures and the love of God, supposes them to be innocent in some degree, as from criminal indulgences we must absolutely and altogether abstain. It is evident, therefore, that it is the excess and the immoderate pursuit of what are called *innocent* pleasures, which constitute their immorality. When our violent attachment to frivolous amusements engrosses all our thoughts and all our time, and makes us neglect our duty to God and the proper duties of our station.

The only pleasures which dignify and are therefore worthy a rational creature, are either of the intellectual, of the social, or of the moral kind; those which spring from contemplating the works of creation and from the search of truth, or from the exercise of our social affections, from acts of benevolence, love and charity; or from the consciousness of having discharged our duty to God, our neighbour, and ourselves; these pleasures, we may be certain, our religion could

could never intend to prohibit, or in general, to restrain.

And, as the mere animal part of our nature requires some attention, we may partake, in some degree, even of sensual pleasures, which are indeed necessary to our subsistence; and the cares and fatigue of business demand also intervals of relaxation and repose.

Here, then, we have need of our utmost caution and circumspection, that we do not suffer what is only on some occasions *lawful*, to become at all times *necessary*; nor make what was intended to recruit our spirits after the fatigue of business, more fatiguing than business itself; which, it is to be feared, is too frequently the case.

Too eager a pursuit of pleasure and amusement, seems indeed amongst every class of people to be the prevailing propensity of the age; and the consequent neglect of religious duties is but too notorious. As the love of pleasure has abounded, the love of God has in proportion waxed cold.

Yet the conduct of persons in higher life, one would charitably hope, has been either
misre-

misrepresented or at least greatly aggravated, by the partial views of morose observers, or by the licentious pens of satyrical writers; who, from the indiscretion, or perhaps the real profligacy of too many, have represented the great world in general "as altogether" become abominable," and entirely devoted to luxury and licentious pleasures; as engaged at least in perpetual scenes of riot and dissipation, as sacrificing their time and fortunes, wasting every hour of the day, and often of the night, in trifling if not guilty indulgences.

But though this representation may, I fear, be too extensively just, there are, I am persuaded, numberless exceptions. And, probably, some of the most exalted characters are to be found amongst those in the highest stations; men who resign the pleasures, and even the comforts of life in compliance with the duties which they owe to their country; attending early and late to the affairs of the publick, vigilant in counteracting the machinations of our foreign and our domestick enemies.

I wish

I wish the like favourable supposition could justly be extended to every part of the community. But, alas! it is too notorious, that what is called the world, that is, the fashionable [and even the busy] world, are too generally infected, or rather intoxicated, with the love of pleasure and an habit of dissipation. Notwithstanding the distresses of the nation, and our accumulated taxes, every expensive place of publick resort is crowded beyond measure; the publick theatres, the publick concerts, the publick gardens, and every publick place, except the places of publick worship; so that they must hazard life and limb to gain admittance. People thus infatuated can find no more leisure for their secular affairs than for their religious concerns, their rage for pleasure renders them equally unfit for both.

Cloyed with the plain, wholesome food of domestick comfort, they flee from place to place, from the country to the metropolis, from the metropolis again to provincial scenes of frivolous amusement, to the sea-coast, to the continent, by sea and by land, exhibiting

^c "Navibus atq; quadrigis," says a Heathen poet, of a people less dissipated, perhaps, than some good Christians.

themselves every where, but where their duty and their true interest calls them; their country-seats, or their proper stations, among their friends, their neighbours, and dependents, exercising hospitality and charity, assisting the distressed, relieving the poor, and encouraging the industrious; and in these employments, I make no doubt, they would find not only amusement, but more real enjoyment than in the pursuit of a phantom of pleasure, which perpetually eludes their grasp.

But they still persevere in the same giddy circle, till every species of amusement is exhausted. They then sit down languid and fatigued, weary of life, and disgusted with every thing around them.

As for that class of men, who are under a necessity of spending their lives in honest industry, and in the exercise of some necessary trade or ingenious art, such valuable members of society have certainly as good a right as their superiors to rejoice in the fruit of their labour, and occasionally to partake of the innocent recreations and amusements of life.

But when people of this description, instead of taking pleasure in their business or

profession, make pleasure their whole business and profession; when they are daily in pursuit of some expensive amusement or idle avocation; spending their time and money in publick-houses, with idle, or, more probably, with vicious companions, regardless of the complaints or distresses perhaps of their families; such unhappy wretches will soon be reduced to indigence and shame in this world, and will have a sad account to give of their time and talents in the world to come.

But, whatever our fortune or situation in life may be, no man is sent into the world "like the Leviathan, merely to take his pastime," (as the Psalmist expresses it) and to amuse himself; but has some serious duties which demand his attention, and, whether he is loitering the whole morning in the streets or in a coffee-room, or revelling at noon in the licentiousness of a tavern, or at night in the pandæmonium of a gaming-house, the difference in this respect is not very considerable. If these *occupations*, for it is an abuse of language to call them *pleasures*, make him forget or neglect his duty to God, the slothful and the wicked servant will,

will, it is to be feared, share the same condemnation.

As for those "men of pleasure," whom we frequently hear spoken of with a degree of approbation, as agreeable and sprightly characters, let us not be imposed upon by specious names and plausible appearances. A "man of pleasure" is too often one who pursues his own pleasure at the expence of his neighbour's domestick peace, or seeks it in the ruin of innocence, or who indulges his sensual appetites in contempt of the laws of temperance and sobriety.

And as for parties of pleasure, the most innocent parties distinguished by that captivating appellation, seldom answer our expectations, and generally terminate in lassitude and disappointment.

In short, let us fix upon some useful plan of life, adhere to it with steadiness and regularity, and be contented with those intervals of relaxation and amusement which nature requires and religion allows; nor sacrifice our *real* happiness both here and hereafter to fantastick or vicious pleasures. An habit of trifling will lead us into serious evils, and a few

few transient gratifications, succeeded by ages of pain and remorse, is a wretched purchase,

Let us, then, cultivate a taste for more rational amusements, those which are to be found in devotion and charity; those heartfelt joys which spring from relieving the distressed and comforting the afflicted. Our time, I am convinced, would pass much more to our satisfaction, if spent in the performance of such acts of benevolence, and the duties which our station in life requires, than in strolling from one scene of dissipation to another; which, if we think at all, the sense of the impropriety of such a conduct must contaminate and embitter our enjoyment.

To conclude; in our reasoning on this subject, let us not forget that we are Christians, the disciples of Him whose followers were called to a life of mortification and self-denial, instead of pleasures and self-indulgence; and his apostles assure us, that "those who live "in pleasures, are dead whilst they live," that is, by the violent pursuit of pleasure the vital principle of faith is extinguished in their souls, "the love of pleasure has banished "the love of God."

Our

Our principal concern in this transitory life is to prepare us for the happiness of a more durable state, to which nothing is more inimical than a life of sensual pleasures and frivolous amusement. If we place our supreme felicity in such brutal or childish enjoyments, we shall never relish the more refined and more exalted joys of heaven. And being for ever deprived of those objects, in which we have been so long accustomed to place our present happiness, nothing can remain but endless misery and remorse, the necessary consequence of unsatisfied desires.



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 in which we have been so long accustomed
 to find our present happiness, nothing can
 remain but endless misery and remorse, the
 necessary consequence of unassisted desires.



ADVERTISEMENT

ON

HAPPINESS.

SERMON VIII.

ADVERTISEMENT.

ON this interesting subject the moral writers of every age have displayed their eloquence, and directed us in our researches after happiness, and the means of obtaining it. My attempt goes no further than to enquire wherein human happiness consists, and to prove, that, notwithstanding the reiterated complaints of the miseries and vanity of human life, there is a great degree of happiness within our reach. If, therefore, men are resolved to sacrifice their happiness to the irregular indulgence of their passions and appetites, let them not cast the blame on Providence, but on their own wickedness and folly.

SERMON VIII.
ON HAPPINESS.

PSALM CXLIV. 15.

HAPPY ARE THE PEOPLE THAT ARE IN SUCH A CASE;
YEA, BLESSED ARE THE PEOPLE, WHO HAVE THE LORD
FOR THEIR GOD.

THE Psalmist is here describing the national happiness of the Jewish people, when, by the favour and protection of God, they were delivered from their enemies, and flourished in a state of peace and plenty; “when their sons grew up as the young plants, and their daughters as the polished corners of the temple; when their pastures abounded in flocks and herds, their granaries were filled with all manner of stores, and there was no complaining in their streets.”

“Happy are the people that are in such a case; (says he) yea, blessed are the people, who have the Lord for their God.”

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The writings of philosophers and divines, in every age, abound with melancholy reflections on the miseries of human life; and describe our present state of existence as a scene of constant trouble and disappointment, as “altogether vanity and vexation of spirit.” And certainly, from the great prevalence of vice in the world, and the calamities and distresses to which even good and virtuous men are frequently exposed by the wickedness of others; the present state of human affairs is such, that some men have run into blasphemous reflections and impious murmurs against the goodness and wisdom of God, and to call in question the moral government of a world, where the virtuous and the vicious are equally doomed to a state of wretchedness, and where no such thing as happiness is to be found.

The royal author of this Psalm, however, supposes a case, in which, if it be not their own fault, mankind *may* be happy; that is, in the practice of virtue, and the consequent favour and protection of Almighty God. And if a single instance can be produced of one single man, much more of a whole nation,

nation, having been really happy, this is a sufficient argument of the possibility of the thing.

I am aware, indeed, that the *prosperity* of a nation, and the *happiness* of any individual, is a different consideration. But, as nations are composed of individuals, the same virtuous and religious conduct will produce the happiness of the one, and the prosperity of the other.

The use, then, I propose to make of these words is to shew,

1st, That notwithstanding the many calamities and vexations incident to human life, yet there is a considerable degree of happiness to be obtained even in this world; and,

2dly, That the practice of religion and virtue, and the consequent favour of God, are the only infallible means of obtaining happiness.

First, then, I shall endeavour to prove (what some people will think wants no proof) that there is a degree of happiness to be found, even in this life; or rather, that mankind in general, except in very extraordinary cases, have it in their power to be happy.

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I have said a *degree of happiness*, because by happiness is not meant the happiness of angels, or the happiness which we suppose will be the lot of the saints in heaven; but such a degree of it as so imperfect a creature in the scale of being as man was intended to enjoy. Nor would I attempt to prove, that a man necessarily *must* be, but that, if it is not his own fault, he possibly *may* be happy. And to arraign the goodness or wisdom of God for not making man absolutely perfect or *necessarily happy*, is the same absurdity, as to condemn the potter (according to St. Paul's allusion) for not making every vessel of the same beautiful proportion, or of the same dignity and honour.

Now, in order to prove this point, I shall first enquire, wherein the happiness of man must consist; and secondly, whence it comes to pass that so great a part of mankind are unsuccessful in their pursuits of it.

God has thought fit to produce a great variety of creatures, endowed with various instincts, powers, and principles of action. Now, as the happiness of every creature must consist in living agreeably to its nature, the
happiness

happiness of different animals must vary according to their various natures and organs of perception. The beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fishes of the sea, must have different kinds of happiness from each other. To complain, therefore, that man is not capable of a more perfect felicity, is as unreasonable as it would be for a fly or any other insect to complain that it was not as happy as an archangel.

Since the happiness of man, then, must arise from living and acting agreeably to his nature, let us enquire of what particulars the true nature of man is composed.

Now, though mankind partake, in common with inferior creatures, of some inferior principles; though he has the same appetites and instincts, and the same organs of perception with some other animals; yet he is essentially distinguished from all of them by the superior faculties of reason and reflection, by his intellectual and moral powers, by his conscience and innate^d sense of the beauty or deformity, the guilt or innocence, of his ac-

^d See Bishop Butler's Sermons.

tions. Neither is it a sufficient or adequate account of the nature of man, to say, that he has various instincts and principles of action, unless we allow that one of these principles, that is, reason or conscience, bears upon it evident marks of authority over the rest, and claims the absolute dominion over them all; to permit or to forbid their gratification. Neither can any human being be said to act conformably to his nature, unless he allows that superior principle the authority which is due to it.

The constituent parts of our nature, then, are principally the senses, the appetites, the passions, and affections, and the fancy or imagination; all which have a right to be gratified, under the direction of the superior principle of reason. As we are endued with sensual appetites and animal passions, we may partake of the good things of this life (as they are called) and even of sensual pleasures, in some degree, and in due moderation. As we are furnished with the powers of fancy, we may innocently amuse ourselves with the pleasure of imagination, with all the various beauties of nature and of art; and with what-

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ever is elegant and ornamental in life, suitably to our rank and station. But the chief source of our highest and purest enjoyment are the social passions; the conjugal, parental, and filial affections; with those of humanity, generosity, sympathy, and compassion, which unite mankind in a mutual intercourse of kind and benevolent actions. Yet all these must be kept under the strict regulation of reason and religion, so as not to interfere with the claims of each other; for, if they are not so regulated, they will be so far from contributing to the happiness of our lives, that they will probably make us extremely unhappy. And, in this respect, the man of pleasure and the philosopher, the man of learning and the man of taste, are upon the same footing with the covetous, the ambitious, or the debauchee. By indulging any one principle of their nature to the prejudice of the rest, by giving way to any one passion or appetite, by gratifying their imagination, their curiosity, their philosophical speculations, or even their social and benevolent propensities, beyond the bounds of moderation, they necessarily destroy that

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harmony

harmony and due balance of the affections, that tranquillity of soul, without which true happiness cannot possibly subsist. Thus compassion may be so excessive as to defeat its end—of assisting the distressed, and parental fondness be detrimental to the offspring.

But, on the other hand, when this regular self-government is maintained, when the different faculties and principles of our nature, the senses and appetites, the passions, affections, and imagination, have their respective gratifications allowed them only in due proportion to their importance; so that one passion or appetite does not prevail over the rest, nor any of them rebel against the sovereign principle of reason; then, probably, we shall enjoy all the felicity we are capable of in our present imperfect state of existence.

But to place in a more striking light the possibility and the nature of human happiness, let us suppose a man of any rank or station, (for happiness is not confined to any particular rank of life) let us suppose him to be possessed of a competence, though ever so slender, suited to the demands of his station; let such a one discharge faithfully the several
branches

branches of his duty to God, to himself, and to his neighbour; let him be regular in his devotions, prudent and temperate in the government of himself, just and charitable to his neighbours; kind to his domesticks, and, if blest with children, breeding them up in habits of industry and sobriety, and in the fear of the Lord; and, in consequence of all this, let him be rewarded, as he probably will be, with the perpetual sunshine of a clear conscience, with health and cheerfulness of spirits, with the respect and esteem of his neighbours, and, finally, with the reverence and love of his children, and the dutiful and faithful service of his domesticks; what can prevent such a one from enjoying a considerable degree of happiness even in this world?

“Nothing, you will say, but the many unavoidable accidents and calamities incident to human nature.”

But our imaginary happy man is supposed to be adorned with the Christian virtues of patience, meekness, and resignation to the will of heaven; and such a frame of mind will greatly alleviate, if not render him entirely easy, under these little abatements and

occasional interruptions of that general state of tranquillity and self-enjoyment, which must certainly be the lot of the person we have described,

In our journey through life, the best of us must expect to meet with some trifling inconveniences and impediments in our way, and can rarely hope to find on the road those accommodations to which we have been accustomed at home. But these little variations, with proper management, would rather heighten, than diminish the enjoyment of life, as the relief from *pain* is itself attended with a great degree of *pleasure*. These, therefore, ought not to be urged as arguments against the possibility of that degree of happiness for which we are contending.

I proceed, then, to the second particular proposed under this head; that is, to enquire whence it comes to pass that so great a part of mankind fail of that happiness which we all aspire after, and which we were evidently designed by Providence to enjoy? Though, after what has already been said, this difficulty seems obviously to be accounted for; from want of due attention to our conduct,
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we are too prone to yield to the impulse of the first passion, which is excited in our minds by the imagination; and if we indulge any one of our instincts or natural propensities to the prejudice of the rest, if we frequently give way to any boisterous passion or unruly appetite; much more, if we enslave ourselves to any vicious habit, to intemperance, drunkenness, or sensuality; nay, if we addict ourselves too earnestly (as was before observed) even to the pursuits of learning or the speculations of philosophy, to subjects of mere curiosity, or the pleasures of imagination, in defiance of the dictates of reason; these will not only destroy that calm self-enjoyment and tranquillity of mind which is essential to true felicity, but also make us neglect the proper duties of our station, and the just claims of society. And the consciousness of such neglect, and of our wrong behaviour, with the consequent displeasure of Almighty God, to whom we are accountable for our conduct, must necessarily render us completely miserable.

How many instances do we daily behold of men who sacrifice their health, their fortune,

tune, and their reputation, to those vicious indulgences! How many families do we see reduced to indigence and distress by the vanity and pride, or, perhaps, by the too elegant taste for splendor and magnificence, or useless trifles, by some inconsiderate prodigal or virtuoso!

Now, with what justice can we complain of the dispensations of Providence, or lament the hard lot of humanity, when we thus wantonly sport with, and voluntarily resign, the happiness which was evidently within our reach!

Again; who can pity the wretchedness that attends disappointed ambition, unsatisfied avarice, or unbridled luxury and sensuality?

One man laments the want of success in his profession, or that he has not met with that encouragement in life, with which persons of inferior merit perhaps have been rewarded. But before he arraigns the injustice of the world, let him carefully scrutinize his own conduct; whether, in the choice of a profession, he did not consult his inclination rather than his genius, and engage in a way of life for which he was unqualified; or, whether

whether he has not been negligent of his own interest, and let slip the opportunities of advancing himself in the world; and consequently, whether he can justly blame any one but himself, that he has been less prosperous and less happy than he probably might have been.

Lastly; there are many who languish with disgust, and are cloyed with too much plenty, and have no other want but that of health, to enjoy the blessings with which they abound.

Yet, indolence and want of exercise, or some inattention to the means of health, are probably the cause of this. And if no vicious indulgence has contributed to it, yet, perhaps, some *comparative* intemperance or irregularity, beyond the demands of nature or the strength of their constitution, may have laid the foundation of some tedious and tormenting disease.

But it may yet be said, perhaps, that a great part of mankind are born to such a state of poverty and wretchedness, that the means of happiness were never in their power or within their reach.

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To this it may be answered, that a state of absolute poverty is not so very common as the objection supposes. A man cannot be said to be poor, at least only comparatively so, who has the conveniences, or even the necessities of life, which honest industry will generally procure. Nature is contented with a very little; and where any one is prevented, either by sickness or any natural disability, from procuring even that, the laws of almost every civilized country, or the compassion of their fellow-creatures, seldom fail to supply them. So that if such objects cannot be termed happy, a contented mind will prevent them from being absolutely miserable.

But the most insuperable obstacle to the uninterrupted felicity even of the most wise and the most virtuous man, is the sickness, the death, or, what is more afflicting, the immoral conduct of those to whom he is united by the tender ties of love, friendship, or natural affection; his children, the wife of his bosom, or his friend. For though, by constant care and circumspection, we should be able to secure our own health, and be free from any other misfortune, yet the sufferings

sufferings or the loss of those whom we so affectionately love, must make us unhappy. The pangs of grief, and the tender feelings of humanity, will not listen to the remonstrances of reason, or even the consolations of religion. And this, it must be confessed, is the most formidable objection to our system, and renders the possibility of any durable happiness in this life precarious and uncertain.

Yet, even in these distressful circumstances, if we have done all in our power to relieve, assist, or admonish our friends, the consciousness of right behaviour, and the pleasure which attends the sympathy with those who are dear to us, will greatly alleviate our affliction on these sad occasions; especially if we add the consolation to be drawn from the Christian virtues of faith and hope: faith in the gracious promises and mercy of God, and the hope of an happy re-union with our lost friends in a more perfect state of existence hereafter.

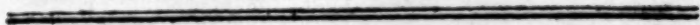
From what has been already said, the second general observation from the words of the text, I flatter myself, is sufficiently proved, and wants little further confirmation; namely,

namely, “ that the practice of religion and
 “ virtue, and the favour and protection of Al-
 “ mighty God, are the only infallible means
 “ of securing the happiness of the present
 “ life, as well as of that which is to come.”

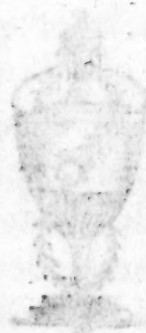
For, as our happiness depends on the due regulation of our appetites, passions, and affections, *that* is the peculiar office of virtue, and a principal part of religion. *That* also is the surest method of obtaining the favour of God, to whom we are accountable for our conduct. And the protection of God is our only security against *natural* evil, as faith in Christ is the only remedy for *moral* evil, and the evil of sin, to which human frailty is too generally subject; and for which even *repentance* could give us no assurance of pardon, without the mediation and atonement of our Redeemer Jesus Christ.

To conclude; after all that can be said on the subject of human happiness, it is at best so transient and so imperfect, so necessarily alloyed with trouble, and so precarious in its duration, that to alleviate the pain which must arise from disappointment, let us not expect too much, nor engage our affections
 too

too deeply in the affairs of this world, but look forwards to a more complete felicity in that future state of existence, “where alone true joys (and those of eternal duration) are to be found.”



too deeply in the affairs of this world, but
 look forward to a more complete felicity in
 that future state of existence, "where none
 of us joys (and there of eternal duration)
 are to be found."



EVANGELICAL RIGHTEOUSNESS.

SERMON IX.

EVANGELICAL RIGHTHOUSNESS.

SERMON IX.

SERMON IX.

EVANGELICAL RIGHTEOUSNESS.

MATTHEW V. 20.

FOR I SAY UNTO YOU, EXCEPT YOUR RIGHTEOUSNESS SHALL EXCEED THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES, YE SHALL IN NO CASE ENTER INTO THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.

WE cannot but wonder, that there should be any dispute about the essential doctrines of Christianity, when Christ himself has so often explained the nature of his own institution. In this discourse to his disciples on the mount, in particular, our blessed Saviour explains and enforces some of the most important precepts of the gospel.

And first, in order to undeceive his followers in regard to their expectation of a temporal deliverer, he begins his instructions with those sublime paradoxes called *The*

Beatitudes; in which, contrary to the prevailing maxims of the world, he pronounces those blessed or happy who meekly submit to poverty and persecution in this life, in expectation of a reward in heaven. Yet to obviate the calumny thrown upon him by the zealots for the institutions of Moses, he assures them, that he came “not to destroy “the Law and the Prophets,” but, in every sense of the word, “to fulfil them.” And, as a proof of this, he in several instances refines upon the doctrines even of the Scribes and Pharisees, who pretended the greatest veneration for the Law of Moses; and tells his disciples, that “unless *their* righteousness “should exceed the righteousness of the “Scribes and Pharisees, they should in no “case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

From these words I shall take occasion to enquire,

1st, What the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees was, which our Saviour here pronounces insufficient to qualify them for the kingdom of heaven; and

2dly, What kind and degree of righteousness, is required of us for that purpose.

Such.

Such frequent mention indeed is made of the Scribes and Pharisees, in the history of our blessed Saviour, that any information on this subject may seem unnecessary to those who can read their Bible; but as so great a part of the precepts and reproofs of Christ have a reference to *their* principles, and cannot be well understood without understanding their peculiar tenets, we may be the more minute in our enquiries.

Our Saviour usually mentions the Scribes and Pharisees in conjunction; because, though the name of Scribes was applied to learned men of different professions, yet the Scribes here meant were of the sect of the Pharisees, and because they both agreed in the distinguishing part of their character, that of imposing upon the people by an extraordinary zeal for the externals of religion, without any regard to holiness of life, or to the duties of morality.

What little difference we may occasionally discover in the behaviour of the Scribes and Pharisees to our Saviour, arose probably from the profession of the Scribes, which was that of interpreters of the law, both civil and ecclesiastical,

clesiastical, to the people. The Scribes, therefore, were in general, the most learned of that sect, and were either judges in the grand council or Sandedrim, or else teachers in their schools or synagogues; from their great knowledge in the law, it is that the terms Lawyers and Scribes are used indifferently in the New Testament to denote the same sort of persons. The Scribes, indeed, admitted in some degree the authority of those traditions which had been added to the original law, as well as the Pharisees, but they laid a greater stress upon the written law; whereas the Pharisees were so bigotted to their traditions, that they seem almost entirely to have neglected the original law, which those traditions pretended to explain. Accordingly, we find that the Scribes accused our Saviour of blasphemy, for taking upon him to forgive sins; the Pharisees censured him for eating with publicans; the one was a breach of the law, the other contrary to their received traditions.

From this short account, then, it is not difficult to discern wherein the righteousness of the Scribes differed from that of the Pharisees.

risees. The Scribes seem to have considered the law in no other light than as a rule for the civil conduct of the people, and esteemed the violation of it rather as a crime against the state, than as a sin against God. Confining themselves chiefly to the judicial law, they probably had no other idea of it than what their courts suggested; as a modern practitioner considers the actions of men in no other view than as cognizable by the statutes of the realm, and never regards them as moral or immoral, but as legal or illegal, and liable to prosecution. And in that sense we may understand the account which is given of our Saviour's manner of instructing the people: "He taught them as one having authority, and not as the Scribes."

While the Scribes were disputing about the precise literal interpretation of every expression, quoting precedents and opinions, and determining what might or might not be done without incurring the penalty of the law; our Saviour (like the prophets of old) entered deeply into the spirit and intention of it, and shewed them that the end of the law was sincere obedience and holiness of life, which
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he enforced upon them with great gravity, and a true zeal for the welfare of his disciples. The Scribes, in their interpretations, relied much upon the authority of the ancient Rabbis, what had been said "by them of old time; 'but I say unto you, (says our great master) by the authority which is given me by God himself.'

As the Scribes, then, were thus attentive to the *written law*, the Pharisees, in general, were no less zealous for their *oral traditions*, which, they pretended, were of equal authority with the law itself. They asserted, indeed, (though without sufficient foundation) that most of their traditions were given to Moses by God himself upon mount Sinai, the oral precepts as an exposition of the written law, and that they had been delivered down, by a succession of prophets and elders, to their own times.

These traditions many of them were innocent enough in themselves, and only became blameable by the superstitious regard which was paid to them by the Pharisees; nay, many of them were probably invented by conscientious men, as barriers or outworks to guard

guard against the violation of the law itself. Thus, for instance, those that were more scrupulous than ordinary in observing the sabbath (to avoid all possibility of profaning it) began their sabbath at three o'clock in the afternoon of the preceding day; so likewise, though the law allowed a criminal to be punished with forty stripes, yet, to prevent their transgressing the number, they made it an inviolable rule never to exceed thirty-nine, or forty stripes save one.*

Thus far was not amiss; but in time these traditions acquired an authority amongst the Pharisees, even superior to the law itself; those especially which happened to fall in with the carnal and selfish passions of mankind. Of which our Saviour reproaches the Pharisees with a most flagrant instance, that of teaching the people to elude the sacred obligation of honouring their parents, by a most scandalous evasion; by pretending to dedicate to the service of the Temple that

* Might not our military and naval officers learn mercy of the Jews, and confine the number of their stripes to forty? Those who were not reformed by that number, repeated at proper intervals, should be discharged as incorrigible.

money with which they ought to have relieved their parents in distress.

Nay, as they had conceived a notion that these superficial works were in themselves meritorious; they had multiplied them to an immoderate degree, so that these superstitious works of supererogation had so far engrossed their attention, and taken it off from the more substantial moral precepts of the law, that (as our Saviour justly reproaches them) "they had made the law of God of none effect," by their licentious comments and trifling traditions.

Hence, though our Saviour frequently denounces the severest woes against the Scribes and Pharisees, for their hypocritical and iniquitous practices, yet the righteousness which he here tells his disciples was insufficient to qualify them for the kingdom of heaven, was that spurious righteousness which they taught, rather than that which they pretended to practise; for, indeed, who could suppose, that men of such corrupt lives as our Saviour openly pronounces many of them to have been, could be entitled to the happiness of heaven?

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He here grants them, indeed, all the merit that any of them could pretend to—that caution and exactness not to offend against the letter of the law; that scrupulous performance of the ceremonious and less important parts of it; that learning and superficial piety, which had gained them the veneration of the people. Nay, he allows them to sit in Moses' seat, and even bids his disciples to “observe and do” whatsoever they should command them agreeably to the law of God, of which they were the *authorized* expounders; yet he cautions them against imitating their ostentatious and hypocritical conduct, or expecting to obtain the favour of God by such superficial performances; for, says he, “except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

We cannot be at a loss, then, after what has been said, to discover wherein the *righteousness* of the Scribes and Pharisees was defective, and insufficient to entitle them to the kingdom of heaven.

Without

Without having recourse (as some moderns have done) to their want of the righteousness by faith, or of the imputed righteousness of Christ, it is obvious, I think, to infer from the account which has been given of their tenets, in what particulars their righteousness was deficient. It was deficient in *universality*, and internal rectitude, or *sincerity*; that they contented themselves with preaching up a partial obedience to some of the least momentous precepts of the law, and with performing them in an ostentatious hypocritical manner, without any sense of religion in their hearts.

In short, their superstition and hypocrisy had made them entirely neglect the essential duties of the moral law; even the best of them presumed so much on the merit of their good works, (like the proud Pharisee at his devotions in the Temple) that our Saviour assures us, a *repentant* sinner would be justified rather than such a conceited Pharisee, who fancied he had no sins to repent of.

As it evidently appears, then, what were the defects in the righteousness of the Scribes
and

and Pharisees, it will not be difficult to determine, as I proposed,

2dly; How *our* righteousness must be qualified, to entitle us to the "kingdom of heaven." In short, it must be the reverse of that of the Scribes and Pharisees, it must be *universal* and *sincere*, and performed from a principle of *obedience* to God, and of *faith* in Jesus Christ.

A man may probably live an inoffensive life; may be sober, temperate, and chaste, from natural temper and complexion; and may perform many laudable actions from a sudden impulse of benevolence or compassion. But these are rather amiable than virtuous deeds; and as circumstances vary, may happen to be either mischievous or beneficial; at least, that righteousness (if we may call it so) which rests on so unsteady a foundation as natural temper, must be very precarious and uncertain in its operation.

But, to apply this theory to the real state of things, we may ask, who are the Scribes and Pharisees of the present times; or whether any denomination of Christians may be said to teach such doctrines, or to trust to such

such a righteousness as will not avail them to salvation?

This is a question of some importance, but such as no earthly power has a right to determine; yet if there be any Church or body of Christians who publickly profess that penances and pilgrimages, masses and death-bed charities, or any other human devices whatsoever, may be substituted in the place of true repentance and holiness of life; such a body of men, if any such still exist, may (one would think, without breach of charity) be charged with more than either pharisaical hypocrisy or superstition.

But indeed, bigots of every sect are for fixing this character on their adversaries, or those that differ from them in their system of doctrine or religious discipline. The rapturous enthusiast calls the regular devotion and sober piety of the established Church pharisaical pride and formality; the churchman, on the contrary, thinks he may with equal reason retort the charge on the ostentatious sanctity and affected austerity of these zealous reformers, many of whom pride themselves as much in abstaining from “good works,”

as others do in performing them. But it is certainly uncharitable in the highest degree to charge any society of men with what is generally to be ascribed to the folly or hypocrisy of a few individuals, who will take refuge in any absurdity or superstition, rather than submit to the practice of true virtue and holiness of life.

We may venture, however, with St. Peter, boldly to assert, that "God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation," and in every Church or Society of Christians, "he that feareth God, and *worketh righteousness*, is accepted of him."

Men wander from system to system, from one teacher to another, not for *better* but for *different* instruction. They are in hopes of finding some scheme of religion that will flatter their prejudices, sooth them in their vices, and save them the trouble of reforming their lives, which is the *one thing* indispensibly *needful*; they will submit to any austerities, give half their goods, perhaps, to feed the poor; nay, they will talk eternally about religion, and read with patience the most tedious disputes about "faith and works," and

and other abstruse points of divinity; but to correct an inveterate habit, or to resist a favourite inclination, this is the great difficulty, this is "the cutting off a right hand, or the plucking out a right eye!"

This was the disappointment which the young man of fortune met with, who came to consult our Saviour on the way to salvation. He did not really want to be informed of his duty; he boasted, with a youthful confidence, that he had kept every precept of the moral law; but having heard that there was something new and extraordinary in the doctrine of Christ, he hoped to have found a preacher who would indulge him in his ruling passion, the love of money; or that he had got some unheard-of system of morality, that would sanctify covetousness, and make selfishness a virtue.

But let no man deceive us with vain words; "he only that doeth righteousness is righteous." The Gospel requires us to be perfect, as far as our nature will admit, "in every good word and work;" to "live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;" to each of which duties an equal attention is to be given.

Many of us may be faultless in one or more of these particulars, and yet defective in the third; we may thank God, like the proud Pharisee, "that we are neither extortioners nor unjust;" we may be honourable in our dealings, and preserve a plausible character in our transactions with each other, and yet be guilty of the most vicious indulgences in our personal capacity; or we may be also sober, chaste, and temperate, and yet entirely neglect our duty to God, both in private and publick. But let us not flatter ourselves, that our performing with exactness those precepts of the Gospel which our peculiar circumstances perhaps may make it our interest to perform, will atone for our neglect in those instances which we have a greater propensity to transgress.

The Gospel, indeed, is a covenant of mercy, and a city of refuge for human frailty, but it is also a severe institution, and will relax nothing of its rigour in favour of presumptuous, habitual sinners; nor suffer us to commute or substitute any superficial Pharisical performances in the place of substantial

stantial righteousness and purity of life and morals.

But besides those who, like the Scribes and Pharisees, deceive themselves with superficial works and a partial obedience, there are others, who, to avoid the imputation of hypocrisy or a shew of *virtue*, will glory in the practice of the most scandalous *vices*; as if there were no medium between the ostentation of virtue and the barefaced practice of vice. But such persons pretend not to any religious scruples, and ought rather to be considered as objects of civil reprehension than of religious instruction.

To conclude:—The righteousness which, through faith in Jesus Christ, will entitle us to the favour of God, must consist in a sincere and uniform obedience to the commandments of God. But as a consciousness of our natural infirmity will lead us to enquire for a more favourable interpretation of the law than that of an unsinning obedience, (as to particular acts of sin) here the Gospel of Jesus Christ must relieve us, by declaring the remission of sins to all those, who by
incere

sincere repentance return to God, with an humble confidence in the merits of the same Jesus Christ, our Mediator and Redeemer, to whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all due honour, now and for evermore. *Amen.*



...to the same
...in the merits of the same
...our Father and Redeemer
...the Father and the Holy
...and for ever
...of our Father

...to the same
...in the merits of the same
...our Father and Redeemer
...the Father and the Holy
...and for ever
...of our Father



...to the same
...in the merits of the same
...our Father and Redeemer
...the Father and the Holy
...and for ever
...of our Father

SERMON

ON JUSTICE

ROMANS 13

ON
JUSTICE.

SERMON X.

ON

JUSTICE

SERMON X.

SERMON X.

ON JUSTICE.

ROMANS xiii. 7.

RENDER THEREFORE TO ALL THEIR DUES: TRIBUTE, TO WHOM TRIBUTE IS DUE; CUSTOM, TO WHOM CUSTOM; FEAR, TO WHOM FEAR; HONOUR TO WHOM HONOUR.

THE Jews had been so long under a theocracy, and the immediate government of a particular Providence; that they fancied themselves exclusively the favourites of Heaven; as they were, in some sense, the peculiar people of God. They, therefore, could never submit with patience to the yoke of the Roman government, but were continually endeavouring to shake it off by insurrections and rebellions; nay, they thought it a degradation, and beneath the dignity of a true Israelite, to pay taxes or tribute to an heathen sovereign; and probably pleaded conscience for their refusal.

This

This mistaken opinion the Apostle takes great pains to rectify, by assuring his converts, that governments of every kind were "the ordinance of God;" and as Providence had thought fit to subject them to a foreign government, they were obliged, "not only "for wrath," or the fear of civil punishment, "but for conscience sake," as a christian duty, to pay whatever tribute should be imposed on them, and to treat their rulers with reverence and honour, "Render, therefore, "to all their dues," &c.

St. Paul here reasons with them on the principles of natural justice: "Your rulers (says he) "are the ministers of God to you "for good," and "bear the sword" to protect your lives and property against violence and fraud; "Render, therefore, to all their "dues;" or, as the original signifies, "Pay "them the debt" of tribute, of reverence, and honour, due to their office, and to the protection which they afford you.

Though the text, then, relates more immediately to the just acknowledgment which we owe to the government under which we live, I shall take occasion to treat of justice
in

in a general and more extensive view; as it ought to regulate the conduct of mankind in their intercourse with each other, on every occasion in common life. For justice may be stiled "the queen of virtues;" not only as being the principal, and as presiding as it were over the other virtues, but as it extends, or ought to extend, its sovereignty and influence over every action of our lives.

As no moral virtue is more generally understood, or its obligation more generally acknowledged, so no one, perhaps, is more frequently violated in common life, than that of justice. So important and so extensive a duty, therefore, cannot be too frequently the subject of our meditations, or too earnestly inculcated on every class of society.

I shall consider justice, therefore, (for method's sake) as demanding our constant attention in our political, our civil, and our social relation; and, in the last place, (though of the first importance) in our religious character, and the homage due to the Sovereign of the Universe.

The first office of justice is negatively expressed by the heathen moralists, and merely forbids

forbids us to injure any one—unless provoked by some injury first done to us, say they. Unenlightened reason could proceed no further. But the justice of a Christian is more enlarged, and assumes in some measure, the amiable form of charity; and, not only forbids us to retaliate an injury, that is, “to return evil for evil,” but strictly enjoins us to “do good to those that despitefully use and persecute us.”

In every view, indeed, and in the eye of reason, justice requires us to render to all what is due to them by the rules of morality and equity, as well as by the letter of the law.

First, then, in their political capacity. As princes and states are chiefly concerned in this particular, it is too much perhaps to expect that those should listen to the precepts of morality or equity, who pay so little regard to justice in their transactions with each other; who encroach, make war, and seize upon the territories of their neighbours, merely as it suits their interest or their ambition, without the least regard to the law of nations, or the natural rights of mankind. And this reproach has been equally applicable

ble in every age, under every form of government; to ambitious common-wealths and to vain-glorious princes.

The Republicks of Greece were continually extending their claims upon each other, with as little regard to justice as the Persian monarchs did upon them. And Rome, in her republican form, confounded right with power; and as unjustly invaded and plundered their neighbouring states, as Cæsar or any of their most ambitious emperors afterwards did. Nay, it is too notorious, that at this day, a great republican nation is invading, pillaging, and depopulating, under a pretence of *re-forming* (for so they call *overturning*) the established governments of every nation in every part of the globe, that will not tamely submit to their usurped authority. But a private individual might, with equal justice, take upon him to regulate the domestick affairs of his neighbour; or, an empirick to

We may say to them, with more justice than the Israelite did to Moses, "Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us?" "Wilt thou smite us, as thou didst the Egyptian lately?" France is undoubtedly a great nation, and has men of great abilities and enlarged minds amongst her present rulers. Let them display true greatness by giving peace to Europe on just
and

force his sovereign specifick upon us, in spite of our reluctance; or our conviction that it was inimical to our constitution.

Though our religion, however, as well as our laws and our liberty, and the property of every individual, is interested in the present state of politicks; it is in vain to hope that those will listen to the voice of justice, who have discarded every principle of religion.

I will not presume, nor have I abilities to instruct magistrates, or to "teach *senators*" "*wisdom.*" And, indeed, there never was a period perhaps when the latter made more equitable laws, or modified those which were in the least oppressive; nor when the former executed them with greater *justice* and impartially, than in the present time.^c

and equitable terms, and spare the further effusion of human blood. And then, as they are making Paris the grand repository of the fine arts, strangers from every part of the world will resort thither; wealth will flow into their capital, their trade and manufactures revive, and France be an *happy* as well as a great people.

^c If the game-laws have been an exception to this, that complaint, I believe, has been lately obviated.

^d Since this was written, I have looked into Mr. Godwin's "Political Justice," which, though a very ingenious theory, seems to have no other tendency than to make mankind dissatisfied with the present state of society, and with every possible

In administering justice, however, circumstances may sometimes be such, as to make it necessary so far to temper *justice* with mercy, that *mercy* itself may coincide with and become no more than strict justice to the offender.

But there is no act of justice which we perform with more reluctance, than that which we owe to the ministers of religion. It is an invidious task to plead a cause in which our own interest is concerned; but surely, if every member of the community is entitled to the benefit of the laws, there is no reason why the clergy should be excepted. No one would be so absurd, in these times, as to urge a divine right to his tythes; but a *legal right* he certainly may. And the same laws which, at present, secure nine parts of the produce to the proprietors of the land, give the tenth to those who are appointed by the constitution to be publick

sible form of government; which, with Mr. Paine, he calls "a necessary evil." But, if government be necessary to restrain the wickedness of mankind, (as he grants) it surely cannot be an evil. I am glad to see the principal parts of this book ably answered, by "an Essay on Population."

instructors

instructors of the people, and to perform the functions of religion. And it is strange that the possessors of estates will not reflect, that the first purchasers, whether they themselves or their ancestors, purchased them with that incumbrance; and it would be no less *unjust* to withhold from the church those legal rights, than it would be for the heir of a family estate to defraud an indulgent parent of her jointure that was charged upon it. "The labourer is worthy of his hire." And if the preserving and diffusing amongst the people religious knowledge, be performing an essential service to the community, as by all good and sensible men is acknowledged, those who are set apart for that purpose, and are debarred from procuring a subsistence by any other employment, are, in common justice, entitled to a maintenance from the publick stock.*

But, secondly, in our *civil* capacity, or as fellow-citizens and subjects, our duty requires

* See this point admirably argued by Dr. Paley, vol. ii. b. vi, ch. 10. Who has said as much to the purpose in a dozen pages, as could have been said in as many volumes.

us not only to contribute to the support of government by submitting cheerfully to those burthens which, for the good of the whole, it may be necessary to lay upon us; and by doing justice to their well-meant endeavours, though the measures which they have adopted may not prove successful; but also, by encouraging others to pay that reverence and honour to the supreme power, so necessary to preserve that subordination which the happiness of the community indispensibly demands.

Yet, the contrary to each of these is too often the case. Every one flatters himself that he is competent to judge, and, of course, that he has a right to censure the measures of government; and, without the *just* allowance for the infinite variety of natural, moral, or accidental impediments to the success of publick transactions, never fails to decide upon them by the event.

In the other instance, that of cheerfully paying "tribute to whom tribute is due, "and custom to whom custom," (as the text requires) there are too many who would scorn to cheat a private individual,
yet

yet make no conscience of defrauding the publick. From a fallacious idea of œconomy, they eagerly will purchase, whenever they have an opportunity, contraband, or, as they are vulgarly called, *smuggled* goods; not considering, that by evading the customs they diminish the revenue; and the deficiency in one instance must be made up by additional taxes in another; which will in the end, affect themselves and every individual. Not to mention that they risk the penalty, and by encouraging the illegal practices of desperate villains, they promote vice, and are guilty of great sin in the sight of God.

Under this head may be reduced that inexhaustible source of injustice—the prejudice of party; which, confining all merit of every kind within its own circle, so liberally bestows on its adversaries every species of contumely and reproach.

It is astonishing to observe, what false reasoning, amongst those of the same party, is admitted as sound argument! What illiberal buffoonery is applauded as sterling wit! And, what improbable tales to the prejudice of their opponents are produced as indisputable facts.

facts. Conscience, perhaps, may secretly plead the cause of truth, and reproach us with our duplicity. But interest, or a desire of distinguishing ourselves by our zeal for the cause, may silence its remonstrances; and we persist, with perfect self-delusion, in our *unjust* and unwarranted surmises.

Thirdly, in our *social* relations, Justice should regulate our conduct, not only in the more important transactions of business or traffick of any kind, but also in our familiar intercourse with our neighbours, our acquaintance, and with our own families; on which our own happiness, and that of those with whom we are connected, more materially depends, than is commonly apprehended.

We violate justice more frequently perhaps in our domestick relations than in any other, because, being off our guard, we make no scruple of abusing our paternal, our conjugal, or that power which a master possesses over his servants and dependents, whose duty obliges them to submit implicitly to our authority. But surely this very consideration, one would hope, should restrain an ingenuous mind from tyrannizing over those who cannot,

not, or at least, dare not make any resistance.

We should be equally attentive to the dictates of justice with regard to our neighbours and acquaintance.

Most people indeed in polished life know too well the value of character; if they have no better principle, than to be guilty of injustice or fraud in matters of property. But with what reluctance do we give the just tribute of applause to the merit of those who have distinguished themselves in any manner, by their publick services or by their private virtues, by their talents or accomplishments of any kind; their learning, their skill, or eminence in any useful or ingenious arts. From envy, pique, or resentment, how often do we refuse them those encomiums which we are conscious they deserve; or, perhaps, we attribute their best actions to wrong motives—their charity to ostentation, their generous acts to vanity, their publick spirit to interest, or a desire of popularity and applause. Our superiors we often accuse of haughtiness and pride, without just cause, or impute their civility or condescension to artifice and design.

sign. Our equals we perhaps unjustly suspect of slighting us, or of affecting a superiority not their due. Our inferiors, if we abstain from oppressing them, we too frequently insult or treat with arrogance or unmerited neglect. Even of our best friends we are apt to entertain injurious suspicions, and, perhaps, impute to them sentiments or views which never entered their thoughts.

But never do we more flagrantly violate the duty of justice in our social intercourse, than in our wantonly sporting with the reputation of our acquaintance, by propagating or countenancing without sufficient foundation, at least without any necessity or sufficient cause, reports injurious to their characters; or, supposing the fact to be notorious, we offend in some degree against justice, by relating it with pleasure and exultation; by aggravating the fault, perhaps, or at least by refusing them that candour and indulgence, of which the frailty of human nature so much stands in need; and which charity at least exacts from every true Christian.

In short, if we injure the credit of another through mere negligence or a thoughtless *loquacity*, without any malicious intention, (which, I trust, is often the case) yet we are so far guilty of manifest injustice; and though the offence be not of so malignant a kind, yet, as it is equally injurious to the subject of our impertinence, it is equally odious; as it shews an unfeeling disposition in him who can “*scatter fire-brands and arrows*” and wound his neighbour *in sport*,” and for the amusement of himself and his company.

It would be endless to enumerate the various arts of slander of which we are guilty, and offend against justice by detraction, contumely, or ridicule; which, though they may recommend us at the moment to the superficial part of those with whom we converse, and though we may rise in our own esteem by depressing the merit of others, yet we really injure our own characters, and render ourselves contemptible in the opinion of all good and sensible men, and extremely odious and criminal in the sight of God; who has assured us, “That of every idle word we must give an account in the day of judgment.”

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To such unfeeling characters, it may have a ludicrous appearance, to extend our ideas of justice to the brute creation; particularly to that part of it which we have domesticated, and made subservient to our use and convenience, to diminish or abridge that labour to which mankind, since the fall, have judicially been made subject. But surely, those that can exercise a tyrannical power, and treat with cruelty their fellow-creatures, (for such the brute animals certainly are) ought themselves to be numbered with the brutes; and we may be assured that He, who "suffers not a sparrow to fall to the ground without his notice," will not behold with indifference any part of his creation treated with cruelty and injustice.

Lastly then, in our religious character, Justice as well as Piety requires us to pay our first and constant tribute of homage and adoration to Almighty God. If we are to "render to all their dues," shall the reverence and honour due to our Maker be excepted? on the contrary, it ought, in every view of justice and gratitude, to be the first object of our attention.

Yet

Yet how many are there (especially in these times) of decent morals, who would be shocked at the imputation of injustice in their transactions with their fellow-mortals, who yet make no scruple of being flagrantly unjust to their Creator and greatest benefactor. They are lavish in their encomiums on *virtue*, to the total exclusion of *religion*; they think it sufficient to be good citizens, without being good christians, or rather, without any sort of religious principle, either natural or revealed; they will punctually, perhaps, pay tribute to the government which protects them, but unjustly withhold the tribute of adoration and gratitude from the Sovereign of the universe, who not only protects them, but on whom they every moment depend for their existence; “in whom they live, and move, and have their being.”

Whilst all other religions which have prevailed in the world have exacted expensive sacrifices and troublesome rites, our religion requires no sacrifice, but that of praise and adoration; no external ceremonies, but the internal devotion of our hearts to God; the exercise of the most delightful affections of
our

our nature, love and gratitude to the Author of our being, and the fountain of our happiness.

In short, reason might suggest what is implied in our Saviour's command, that if we are to "render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's," we ought certainly to "render to God the things that are God's."

To conclude; if we daily perform our *just* homage to God, we shall hardly be unjust in our intercourse with man. For who would dare to appear morning and evening in the presence of the God of justice, if they were conscious of having daily violated his commands, by injuring their neighbour in his property, his character, or his credit? How can they sue for *mercy* at the hands of God, who refuse to do *justice* in their transactions with man? their daily prayers would be a standing remonstrance against their constant practice.

But let us then, when we have paid our tribute of praise and thanksgiving to God, anticipate in thought the business and engagements of the day, and in his presence, and by the assistance of his grace, firmly resolve to act with strict justice and integrity on every

every occasion that may occur; and let us not only render to all what is merely their due, (for if we do not injure those who have not injured us, "what thanks have we; do not even the heathens the same?") but let us exalt our moral conduct to the perfection of the Gospel; and let us shew mercy and exercise charity towards those who may have wronged or traduced us; and thus imitate our Father who is in heaven, who "maketh his sun to rise on the just and on the unjust;" and who, through the merits of Jesus Christ, will shew mercy to us at the great day of retribution. If the severity of our Judge were not tempered with mercy, "no flesh could be saved;" but our ransom is paid, and we may "rejoice in hope" of eternal happiness, through faith in our Redeemer, the same Jesus Christ our Lord; to whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be ascribed all due honour, now and for evermore. *Amen.*

A
L E T T E R
FROM
A FATHER TO HIS SON
AT THE
UNIVERSITY;

RELATIVE TO A LATE
ADDRESS TO YOUNG STUDENTS, &c.

THE SECOND EDITION.

LETTER

FROM

A FATHER TO HIS SON

AT THE

UNIVERSITY

RELATIVE TO A STATE

ADDRESS TO YOUNG STUDENTS

THE SECOND EDITION

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE following letter (a considerable part of it at least) was really written with a view to prevent a serious youth from being made uneasy by Dr. P——y's "Address to Young Students," if it should fall into his hands; and thinking it might be of use to other young men, I had prepared it for the press before I saw the ingenious pamphlet, signed "an Under-Graduate," or the "Letter to Dr. Priestley, by a Country Parson." But, as an object placed in one point of view may catch the attention of those who might overlook it in another light, I have ventured to join the cry, which such an outrage on the publick will certainly excite.

ADVERTISEMENT

THE following letter (a considerable part of it at least) was recently written with a view to prevent a serious youth from being misled, and is signed by Dr. P. ——— "Address to Young Students." It is already full into his hands; and thinking it might be of use to other young men, I had prepared it for the press, before I saw the ingenious pamphlet signed "an Under-Graduate," or the "Letter to Dr. Priesley, by a Country Parson." But as an object placed in our point of view may catch the attention of those who might overlook it in another light; I have now tried to join the two, which such an outrage on the public will certainly excite.

LETTER, &c.

MY DEAR CHARLES,

May 29, 1787.

I Hope that by this time you are reconciled to a College life, and that you will prosecute your studies with some regularity. Do not indulge yourself in that desultory way of reading which Dr. Johnson is *said* to have been fond of; though I am convinced, that, at the University, he must have gone through an uniform course of study, and have made himself master of the sciences usually taught there; otherwise, he could never have written in so clear and systematick a manner, as on almost every subject he has done. I hope you will allot a proper portion of your time, on Sundays at least, to religious subjects, especially of the *practical* kind: but I would not wish you, at present, to meddle with any

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speculative

speculative or controversial points, which would only puzzle and perplex you; and divert your attention from what is your more immediate concern, the study of the initiatory sciences of logick and mathematicks, natural and moral philosophy; which are a necessary foundation for either of the three learned professions.

Yet if you listen to Dr. P—y's "*Address to Young Students*," (on which subject I now write to you) you must lay aside all those studies, for which I am at the expence of giving you an University education, and enter into the wide field of controversial divinity; and not take one step in your academical course, or accept of any scholarship or fellowship, till you have *formed* a *system* of religion for *yourself*, and have "*settled your creed*;" which, if you pursue the Doctor's method, will prove a tedious process; or, at least, a work of time; as he tells his friend, Dr. Price, he has not yet *settled his own creed*, though he must be pretty near his grand climacterick.

That you may not be too much alarmed, nor be imposed upon by the decisive and
dogma

dogmatical air, with which, in these extraordinary letters, Dr. *P—y* addresses you, I would have you reflect, with what indecent presumption he takes it for granted, that those truths, which have been believed and held as sacred by the Christian church for seventeen hundred years, have been embraced, as the true sense of scripture, by individuals of the greatest parts and learning, both in ancient and modern times; and, particularly, after a rigid and minute investigation, have been admitted, with some slight *distinctions*, even by Dr. *Clarke*, nay, by Dr. *P—y*'s friend, Dr. *Price*, and by other deep *reasoners* not strictly orthodox; and are zealously maintained by other dissenters from the established church, of almost every denomination. After all these respectable attestations, I say, that Dr. *P—y* alone should have *discovered* these truths to have no foundation in scripture; and speak of those that maintain them with the utmost contempt, as bigots to authority; and set up his own opinion as the only standard of truth; is surely a most extraordinary phenomenon in the present republick of letters.

Dr. *P—y* is indisputably an excellent chymist and electrical philosopher; writes plausibly and ingeniously upon a great variety of subjects; is of unexceptionable morals, and I am told an amiable disposition in private life. But the man who roundly asserts, that the *popular* opinion of a *soul*, as distinct from the body, has no foundation in reason or scripture, who calls Moses's history of the creation "*a lame account*," speaks contemptuously of St. Paul, and makes even our blessed Saviour himself as *peccable*, and as liable to error, as other mortals; such a man ought surely to be listened to with no common degree of caution, and his opinions not implicitly received as the dictates of infallibility.

The truth is, Dr. *P—y* will believe nothing which he cannot perfectly comprehend, and disclaims with disdain the propriety of the distinction of things *above* and things *contrary* to reason. As, therefore, it is impossible for a finite understanding to comprehend an infinite Being, he must of course (to act consistently) give up the belief of a *Deity*, as well as of a *Trinity*. And indeed, though Dr. *P—y* professes to believe in the
moral

moral attributes of God, (and, I am convinced, is sincere in that profession) yet his doctrine of *materialism* certainly militates against every idea of an intelligent First Cause; and therefore, as he goes beyond *Socinus* in his theological tenets, he seems to approach very nearly to *Hobbes* and *Spinoza*, in the atheistical tendency, at least, of his philosophical system.

I have said thus much (though unwillingly) of the ingenious author of this "Address to Young Students," that you may not be prepossessed in favour of a name, which stands enrolled (as that of an excellent *experimental philosopher*) amidst the most learned societies of Europe and America!

I shall not enter into the merits of the disputed points to which these letters allude; nor, if I thought myself qualified, should I think it necessary to defend the doctrines of our church, that having been so repeatedly performed by very able hands.

I shall only observe, in regard to the Divinity of our Saviour, (the great object of Dr. P—y's inveteracy) that there are so many texts in the New Testament, which, in their most *obvious* sense, evidently imply
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this doctrine, that it might, at least, have escaped Dr. *P—y*'s triumphant ridicule.

He tells his friend Dr. *Price*, that *his Logos* is quite a *diminutive* little gentleman, in comparison with Dr. *Clarke's Logos*; and rallies him unmercifully, on his prejudice, and his timidity, in not launching out boldly into the wide ocean of heterodoxy, in defiance of consequences, as he himself has done.

Let us suppose, however, on this particular, that the words in the first chapter of St. John, which have been always understood so fully to point out our blessed Saviour by the term *Logos*, mean no more than the Almighty *fiat*, or the command, by which God produced the light and the other wonders of the creation, as Dr. *P—y* somewhere asserts, and let us translate it accordingly, and see what sense we can make of it:

“ In the beginning was the *fiat*, and the
 “ *fiat* was with God, and the *fiat* was God;
 “ &c. And the *fiat* was made flesh, and
 “ dwelt among us; and we beheld his glory,
 “ the glory as of the only begotten of the
 “ Father, full of grace and truth;” that is,
 says Dr. *P—y*, “ God spake to mankind by
 “ Jesus

"*Jesus Christ.*" But if that is all which is meant by the words of this pompous exordium; and they do not mean what they evidently *appear to mean*, that Jesus Christ, the subject of his gospel, was a *divine person*, St. John is a very extraordinary writer.

Well, suppose they do, Dr. P—y will tell us, that Christ was called a *divine person*, as we call Plato or Socrates *divine*, to express our sense of their sublime doctrines and uncommon virtues. Or that, in the figurative style of the eastern languages, magistrates, and persons invested with extraordinary power, are sometimes styled gods; or, if this cannot be admitted in *every* passage that speaks of Christ, he will boldly say, (as some of his friends have done) that the first chapter of St. John, and the first and second chapters of St. Matthew and St. Luke, &c, were probably interpolated or foisted in, for some purpose or other, by the Lord knows whom or when. For the sacred text (every one knows) has been carefully and jealously watched, and regularly quoted as the word of God by different sects, from the very times of our Saviour and his apostles to this day.

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In short, Dr. P—y is determined not to admit the divinity of Christ. He therefore, in the first place, endeavours to give a new, and often unheard-of, sense to every text that makes against him; if he cannot do that to his satisfaction, he pretends it is an interpolation, and boldly strikes it out. And thus, right or wrong, will make every thing submit to his arbitrary hypothesis; as Cromwell, when he was resolved to make himself absolute, and an *Unitarian*, murdered the King, turned out the Parliament, knocked down the levellers, and, by fraud or force, by kicking or canting, made every one contribute towards the accomplishing his purpose.

The primitive fathers, in their disputes with hereticks, (as I have somewhere read) first asked them, “whether they acknowledged the divine authority of the holy scriptures;” if they did, they reasoned with them from thence; if they did not, there was an end of the dispute, they had no further *communication* with them.

Dr. P—y calls himself a Christian; as a follower of Pythagoras, I suppose, called himself a Pythagorean. Pythagoras’s scholars,

lars, however, paid a greater deference to *their* master than Dr. P—y does to *his*; and “*ipse dixit*,” “the master has said it,” silenced all objections; they never disputed about the possibility of what he asserted, or suspected that he “*reasoned inconclusively*.” They were thankful for the instruction he gave them, and *humbly* acquiesced. It has always been esteemed as one principal advantage of the Christian Revelation, that it gives us a certain and unerring rule of faith and duty. Christ was said to teach, “as one having *authority*, and not as the *scribes*.” “In this sense (at least) he spake as never man spake.” But if we take away the *inspiration* or *divine authority* of the scripture, Socrates and Tully have *spoken* full as well in many respects. And *Xenophon’s Memorabilia*, or *Tully’s Offices*, and other philosophical works, may be put upon a level with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Though I am convinced, that the Church of England approaches as *near* at least as any other church to the primitive doctrines, yet I am no bigot, Charles, to what is called orthodoxy; and confess, that when I was a
 young

young man, I was inclined to think very freely upon these subjects; and was a little staggered, particularly at the doctrine of the Trinity. But the more I enquired into this mysterious affair, the more I was convinced that it was *revealed* in the *Holy Scriptures*.

The text which first struck me most powerfully, and which I think decisive, and an unanswerable proof of our Saviour's divinity, is that well-known text in the ninth chapter of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, where, enumerating the many peculiar privileges of the Israelites, he crowns them all with observing, that of *them*, "concerning the *flesh*, "Christ came, who (according to his *divine* "nature) is over all, God blessed for ever. "Amen."

And when our Saviour desires to be "glorified with the glory which he had with "God before the world began." And when it is said, that "although he was in "the form of God, and equal with God; yet "he humbled himself, and was made in the "likeness of men." If these words do not

^e John xvii. 5.

^f Phil. ii. 6.

demolish

demolish the *Socinian* system, and imply that Jesus Christ was *something* more than mere man, and had an existence before he was born of the Virgin Mary; we can depend upon no written testimony in any case whatsoever.*

I did not intend to have entered even thus far into the merits of this controversy, but as I have dissuaded *you* from meddling with these speculative opinions at present, I have just pointed out to you these few plain texts, to convince you, that the scriptures are not so decidedly in his favour as Dr. P—y's insulting air might perhaps incline you to suspect.

As Dr. P—y has appropriated to himself and his followers the title of *Unitarians*, he charitably supposes that we, whom he calls *Trinitarians*, worship three Gods. But surely, without incurring such an imputation, we may say, what the scripture evidently implies, that in the divine nature or essence

* N. B. St. Matthew calls Christ *Emmanuel*, that is, "God with us." "Before Abraham was, I am," says Jesus, (John viii. 58.) as God describes himself to Moses, Exod. iii. 11,

there

there is a threefold distinction. That it is above our comprehension, is no more an objection, than it is to God's having existed from all eternity, though no finite understanding can comprehend the manner of such existence.

As for the practical uses of the doctrine which we contend for, and which Dr. P—y thinks so unfriendly to true piety, when we address the Divine Being, not only as the Creator of the Universe, but as he has revealed himself in the amiable character of a Redeemer, and as a friend that knows our infirmities, and assists us by his Holy Spirit in performing his will, we have certainly a more determinate and more *interesting* object of worship, than Dr. P—y's *Unitarian* mechanicks; who are taught to “worship they know not what; a cold, abstracted, philosophical idea, which they can neither love nor fear. They are lost in the immensity of the divine nature; the imagination ranges through the boundless regions of empty space, and finds nothing to interest the heart, or engage the affections.”

We

We are commanded "to honour the Son, "as we honour the Father," which we may certainly do, without being guilty of idolatry; as we believe him to be co-eternal and co-equal with the Father; and as even Dr. *Clarke* himself allows, that the Son partakes of all the attributes of divinity, except self-origination."

But then, as the great Bishop *Sherlock* observes, "the honour paid to Christ is ultimately referred to God the Father, who "has exalted him to the glory which he "had with the Father before the worlds were "made; and given him to be head over all "principalities and powers, even to the consummation of all things."

But to return to the principal intention of this letter, which was to satisfy any scruples

^a Dr. Price also asserts, "that from his miraculous conception, and his coming down from heaven; from his immaculate character, and unparalleled wisdom; from the efficacy ascribed to his death, and from his resurrection; and his being appointed to judge the world; from these and other honours ascribed to Christ in the scriptures, we may safely conclude, (he says) that he was of a superior order to man."—*Sermon on the Christ. Doctrine, &c.*

¹ *Sherlock's Discourses*, vol. iv. disc. i. part 4.

that

that may have been raised in your mind by Dr. P—y's "Address to Young Students."

As I have endeavoured, my son, to breed you up in the principles of, what I verily believe to be, the true religion, you are convinced, I hope, that "*instead* of a fish, I "would not give you a serpent;" or instead of the truth, endeavour to instil into your youthful mind the poison of superstition and error.

I made you read over the articles of our church, which were drawn up by some of "the best and wisest men in the Christian "world." If some things appear abstruse in those articles, a *latitude* seems to be allowed us by that general clause in the article on predestination: "We must receive God's "promises in such wise, as they be *generally* set forth to us in holy scripture, and "expressly declared to us in the word of "God."^k

But as you seemed to have no objection to the principal articles, the sense of which is obvious to the meanest capacity, you ought, in those points which are less clear, to sub-

^k Art. 17.

mit, as you have done, to the united judgment of those learned men, who, in the several ages of the church, have made the scriptures the study of their whole lives.

You are admitted into a society, where you hope to receive instruction and improvement. They have embraced the established religion of their country, which all good and wise men, in every age, have thought it their duty to comply with; and the University expects the same from the young people placed under their care. Any religious test, at their admission, might be thought unnecessary, but you only subscribe to the articles as a layman, and as terms of peace and communion. For what confusion must be the consequence, if so many young people of different religious persuasions, *Papists* and *Presbyterians*; *Baptists* and *Independents*; *Methodists* and *Moravians*; if so many different sectaries, who are generally taught to maintain their peculiar opinions with zeal and obstinacy, were jumbled together in one society, and to have separate places of worship; such a discordant multitude, in the heat of youth, would probably not long be confined

confined to cool reasoning, but support their opinions by the strength of their arms, rather than by that of their arguments; and “*smite each other with the fist of wickedness,*” as they would reciprocally term the resistance of their adversaries.

In short, my dear Charles, you have acted in obedience to your Father in subscribing the articles; as, unless you saw manifest and *important* reasons to the contrary, it was your duty to do. If you live a sober, diligent, and religious life, I trust, you will never be called to an account for embracing speculative opinions, which have been held, with little variation, in the same sense, by the greatest and best men for seventeen hundred years, as the doctrines of the gospel.

But busy men, under a pretence of conscience or a zeal for liberty, are perpetually disturbing the peace of society, and complaining of persecution, in an age when every man writes and publishes, with impunity, whatever his fancy suggests, or his resentment dictates. Deism is openly defended in a Christian country, and republican principles boldly propagated under a monarchical government,

vernment. The act of toleration was formerly esteemed a great acquisition by those that dissented from the established church; the slightest test is now exclaimed against as an intolerable hardship, and a violation of the natural rights of mankind. And though we have so lately experienced the fatal effects of a licentious mob, spirited up, under pretence of zeal for the *Protestant Religion*, to commit the most horrid outrages; yet these advocates for liberty have not been ashamed to plead the cause of wretches under sentence of death for their crimes, and would persuade *them* that the laws which condemned them were arbitrary and unjust.

This, it will be said, is nothing to the present purpose. But those restless spirits, who so boldly propagate their own *private* opinions, in opposition to our ecclesiastical establishment, proceed upon principles which have a tendency to undermine the foundations of all government. "*Nolo seditiosam veritatem,*" said the wise and learned Erasmus. He would have thought it better to acquiesce in a few slight speculative errors, than to disturb the peace of society
by

by propagating even the *truth* in a *sedition*
manner.

I will conclude this letter with the advice
of Solomon.

"My son; fear thou the Lord and the
King, and meddle not with them that are
given to change."

I am,

Your affectionate Father.

